PARTISAN REVIEW

PR

JANUARY, 1948

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ALLEN TATE read "The Eye," the first poem he has published in a magazine in four years, for the Phi Beta Kappa exercises at William and Mary College in December. Scribner is bringing out his **Poems: 1922-1944** next month.

WILLIAM GIBSON'S first book of poems will be published by Oxford University Press this year. He lives in Topeka, Kansas.

LESLIE A. FIEDLER teaches at Montana State University.

ARNOLD HAUSER is a German writer who lives in London.

CLEMENT GREENBERG is a former editor of **Partisan Review.**

KURT LIST is a composer who writes for **Commentary, Modern Review,** and other periodicals.

F. W. DUPEE edited **The Question of Henry James.**

FRANK JONES teaches humanities at the College of the University of Chicago.

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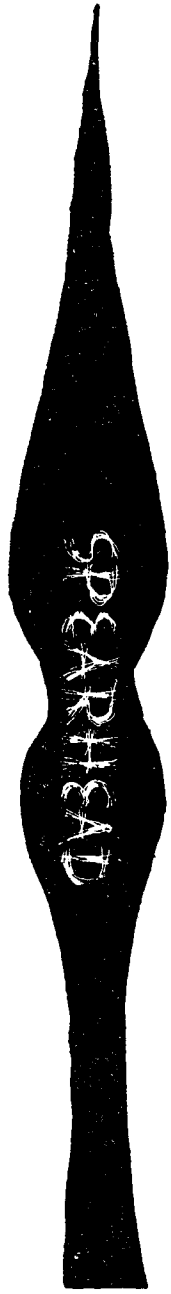

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A drawing, attributed to Charles Baudelaire, of his mistress, Jeanne Duval.

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Jean-Paul Sartre

WHAT IS WRITING?*

"If you want to engage yourself," writes a young imbecile, "what are you waiting for? Join the Communist Party." A great writer who engaged himself often and disengaged himself still more often, but who has forgotten, said to me, "The worst artists are the most engaged. Look at the Soviet painters." An old critic gently complained, "You want to murder literature. Contempt for belles-lettres is spread out insolently all through your review." A petty mind calls me pig-headed, which for him is evidently the highest insult. An author who barely crawled from one war to the other and whose name sometimes awakens languishing memories in old men accuses me of not being concerned with immortality; he knows, thank God, any number of people whose chief hope it is. In the eyes of an American hack-journalist the trouble with me is that I have not read Bergson or Freud; as for Flaubert, who did not engage himself, it seems that he haunts me like remorse. Smart-alecks wink at me, "And poetry? And painting? And music? You want to engage them, too?" And some martial spirits demand, "What's it all about? Engaged literature? Well, it's the old socialist realism, unless it's a revival of populism, only more aggressive."

What nonsense. They read quickly, badly, and pass judgment before they have understood. So let's begin all over. This doesn't amuse anyone, neither you nor me. But we have to hit the nail on the head. And since critics condemn me in the name of literature without ever saying what they mean by that, the best answer to give

* This is an essay from *What Is Literature?* (*Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*), a series of six consecutive pieces which appeared originally in the February through July, 1947, numbers of *Les Temps Modernes*, the monthly review edited by Sartre. The translation is by Bernard Frechtman.

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them is to examine the art of writing without prejudice. What is writing? Why does one write? For whom? The fact is, it seems that nobody has ever asked himself these questions.

I

No, we do not want to "engage" painting, sculpture, and music "too," or at least not in the same way. And why would we want to? When a writer of past centuries expressed an opinion about his craft, was he immediately asked to apply it to the other arts? But today it's the thing to do to "talk painting" in the argot of the musician or the literary man and to "talk literature" in the argot of the painter, as if at bottom there were only one art which expressed itself indifferently in one or the other of these languages, like the Spinozistic substance which each of its attributes adequately reflects.

Doubtless, one could find at the origin of every artistic calling a certain undifferentiated choice which circumstances, education, and contact with the world particularized only later. Besides, there is no doubt that the arts of a period mutually influence each other and are conditioned by the same social factors. But those who want to expose the absurdity of a literary theory by showing that it is inapplicable to music must first prove that the arts are parallel.

Now, there is no such parallelism. Here, as everywhere, it is not only the form which differentiates, but the matter as well. And it is one thing to work with color and sound, and another to express one's self by means of words. Notes, colors, and forms are not signs. They refer to nothing exterior to themselves. To be sure, it is quite impossible to reduce them strictly to themselves and the idea of a pure sound, for example, is an abstraction. As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out in *The Phenomenology of Perception,* there is no quality of sensation so bare that it is not penetrated with signification. But the dim little meaning which dwells within it, a light joy, a timid sadness, remains immanent or trembles about it like a heat mist; it *is* color or sound. Who can distinguish the green apple from its tart gaiety? And aren't we already saying too much in naming "the tart gaiety of the green apple?" There is green, there is red, and that is all. They are things, they exist by themselves.

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It is true that one might, by convention, confer the value of signs upon them. Thus, we talk of the language of flowers. But if, after the agreement, white roses signify "fidelity" to me, the fact is that I have stopped seeing them as roses. My attention cuts through them to aim beyond them at this abstract virtue. I forgot them. I no longer pay attention to their mossy abundance, to their sweet stagnant odor. I have not even perceived them. That means that I have not behaved like an artist. For the artist, the color, the bouquet, the tinkling of the spoon on the saucer, are *things,* in the highest degree. He stops at the quality of the sound or the form. He returns to it incessantly and is enchanted with it. It is this color-object that he is going to transfer to his canvas and the only modification he will make it undergo is that he will transform it into an *imaginary* object. He is therefore as far as he can be from considering colors and signs as a *language.*[1]

What is valid for the elements of artistic creation is also valid for their combinations. The painter does not want to draw signs on his canvas. He wants to create a thing.[2] And if he puts together red, yellow, and green, there is no reason for the ensemble to have a definable signification, that is, to refer particularly to another object. Doubtless this ensemble is also inhabited by a soul, and since there must have been motives, even hidden ones, for the painter to have chosen yellow rather than violet, one can affirm that the objects thus created reflect his deepest tendencies. Only they never express his anger, his anguish, or his joy as do words or the expression of the face; they are impregnated with these emotions; and in order for them to have crept into these colors, which by themselves already had something like a meaning, his emotions get mixed up and grow obscure. Nobody can quite recognize them there.

Tintoretto did not choose that yellow rift in the sky above Golgotha to *signify* anguish, nor to *provoke* it. It is anguish and yellow sky at the same time. Not sky of anguish or anguished sky; it is an anguish become thing, an anguish which has turned into yellow rift of sky, and which thereby is submerged and impasted by the proper qualities of things, by their impermeability, their extension, their blind permanence, their externality, and that infinity of relations which they maintain with other things. That is, it is no longer at

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all *readable*. It is like an immense and vain effort, forever arrested half-way between sky and earth, to express what their nature keeps them from expressing.

Similarly, the signification of a melody—if one can still speak of signification—is nothing outside of the melody itself, unlike ideas, which can be adequately rendered in several ways. Call it joyous or somber. It will always be over and above anything you can say about it. Not because its passions, which are perhaps at the origin of the invented theme, have, by being incorporated into notes, undergone a transubstantiation and transmutation. A cry of grief is a sign of the grief which provokes it, but a song of grief is both grief itself and something other than grief. Or, if one wishes to adopt the existentialist vocabulary, it is a grief which does not *exist* any more, which *is*. But, you will say, suppose the painter does houses? That's just it. He *makes* them, that is, he creates an imaginary house on the canvas and not a sign of a house. And the house which thus appears preserves all the ambiguity of real houses.

The writer can guide you and, if he describes a hovel, make it seem the symbol of social injustice and provoke your indignation. The painter is mute. He presents you with *a* hovel, that's all. You are free to see in it what you like. That attic window will never be the symbol of misery; for that, it would have to be a sign, whereas it is a thing. The bad painter looks for the type. He paints the Arab, the Child, the Woman; the good one knows that neither the Arab nor the proletarian exists either in reality or on his canvas. He offers a workman, a certain workman. And what are we to think about a workman? An infinity of contradictory things. All thoughts and all feelings are there, adhering to the canvas in a state of profound undifferentiation. It is up to you to choose. Sometimes, high-minded artists try to move us. They paint long lines of workmen waiting in the snow to be hired, the emaciated faces of the unemployed, battlefields. They affect us no more than does Greuze with his "Prodigal Son." And that masterpiece, "The Massacre of Guernica," does anyone think that it won over a single heart to the Spanish cause? And yet something is said that can never quite be heard and that would take an infinity of words to express. Picasso's long harlequins, ambiguous and eternal, haunted with inexplicable meaning, inseparable

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from their stooping leanness and their pale diamond-shaped tights, are emotion become flesh, emotion which the flesh has absorbed as the blotter absorbs ink, and emotion which is unrecognizable, lost, strange to itself, scattered to the four corners of space and yet present to itself.

I have no doubt that charity or anger can produce other objects, but they will likewise be swallowed up; they will lose their name; there will remain only things haunted by a mysterious soul. One does not paint significations; one does not put them to music. Under these conditions, who would dare require that the painter or musician engage himself?

On the other hand, the writer deals with significations. Still, a distinction must be made. The empire of signs is prose; poetry is on the side of painting, sculpture, and music. I am accused of detesting it; the proof, so they say, is that *Les Temps Modernes* publishes very few poems. On the contrary, this is proof that we like it. To be convinced, all one need do is take a look at contemporary production. "At least," critics say triumphantly, "you can't even dream of engaging it." Indeed. But why should I want to? Because it uses words as does prose? But it does not use them in the same way, and it does not even *use* them at all. I should rather say that it serves them. Poets are men who refuse to *utilize* language. Now, since the quest for truth takes place in and by language conceived as a certain kind of instrument, it is unnecessary to imagine that they aim to discern or expound the true. Nor do they dream of *naming* the world, and, this being the case, they name nothing at all, for naming implies a perpetual sacrifice of the name to the object named, or, as Hegel would say, the name is revealed as the inessential in the face of the thing which is essential. They do not speak, neither do they keep still; it is something different. It has been said that they wanted to destroy the "word" by monstrous couplings, but this is false. For then they would have to be thrown into the midst of utilitarian language and would have had to try to retrieve words from it in odd little groups, as for example "horse" and "butter" by writing "horse of butter."[3]

Besides the fact that such an enterprise would require infinite time, it is not conceivable that one can keep oneself on the plane of the utilitarian project, consider words as instruments, and at the same contemplate taking their instrumentality away from them. In fact,

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the poet has withdrawn from language-instrument in a single movement. Once and for all he has chosen the poetic attitude which considers words as things and not as signs. For the ambiguity of the sign implies that one can penetrate it at will like a pane of glass and pursue the thing signified, or turn his gaze toward its *reality* and consider it as an object. The man who talks is beyond words and near the object, whereas the poet is on this side of them. For the former, they are domesticated; for the latter they are in the wild state. For the former, they are useful conventions, tools which are used little by little and which one throws away when they are no longer serviceable; for the latter, they are natural things which sprout naturally upon the earth like grass and trees.

But if he dwells upon words, as does the painter with colors and the musician with sounds, that does not mean that they have lost all signification in his eyes. Indeed, it is signification alone which can give words their verbal unity. Without it they are frittered away into sounds and strokes of the pen. Only, it too becomes natural. It is no longer the goal which is always out of reach and which human transcendence is always aiming at, but a property of each term, analogous to the expression of a face, to the little sad or gay meaning of sounds and colors. Having flowed into the word, having been absorbed by its sonority or visual aspect, having been thickened and defaced, it too is a thing, increate and eternal.

For the poet, language is a structure of the external world. The speaker is *in a situation* in language; he is invested with words. They are prolongations of his meanings, his pincers, his antennae, his eyeglasses. He maneuvers them from within; he feels them as if they were his body; he is surrounded by a verbal body which he is hardly aware of and which extends his action upon the world. The poet is outside of language. He sees words inside out as if he did not share the human condition, and as if he were first meeting the word as a barrier as he comes toward men. Instead of first knowing things by their name, it seems that first he has a silent contact with them, since, turning toward that other species of thing which for him is the word, touching them, testing them, palping them, he discovers in them a slight luminosity of their own and particular affinities with the earth, the sky, the water, and all created things.

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Not knowing how to use them as a *sign* of an aspect of the world, he sees in the word the *image* of one of these aspects. And the verbal image he chooses for its resemblance to the willow tree or the ash tree is not necessarily the word which we use to designate these objects. As he is already on the outside, he considers words as a trap to catch a fleeing reality rather than as indicators which throw him out of himself into the midst of things. In short, all language is for him the mirror of the world. As a result, important changes take place in the internal economy of the word. Its sonority, its length, its masculine or feminine endings, its visual aspect, compose for him a face of flesh which *represents* rather than expresses signification. Inversely, as the signification is *realized,* the physical aspect of the word is reflected within it, and it, in its turn, functions as an image of the verbal body. Like its sign, too, for it has lost its pre-eminence; since words, like things, are increate, the poet does not decide whether the former exist for the latter or vice-versa.

Thus, between the word and the thing signified, there is established a double reciprocal relation of magical resemblance and signification. And the poet does not *utilize* the word, he does not choose between diverse acceptations; each of them, instead of appearing to him as an autonomous function, is given to him as a material quality which merges before his eyes with the other acceptation.

Thus, in each word he realizes, solely by the effect of the poetic *attitude,* the metaphors which Picasso dreamed of when he wanted to do a matchbox which was completely a bat without ceasing to be a matchbox. Florence is city, flower, and woman. It is city-flower, city-woman, and girl-flower all at the same time. And the strange object which thus appears has the liquidity of the *river,* the soft, tawny ardency of *gold,* and, to conclude, abandons itself with *propriety* and, by the continuous diminution of the silent *e,* prolongs indefinitely its modest blossoming.* To that is added the insidious effect of biography. For me, Florence is also a certain woman, an American

* This sentence is not fully intelligible in translation as the author is here associating the component sounds of the word Florence with the signification of the French words they evoke. Thus: FL-OR-ENCE, *fleuve* (river), *or* (gold), and *décence* (propriety). The latter part of the sentence refers to the practice in French poetry of giving, in certain circumstances, a syllabic value to the otherwise silent terminal *e.*—Translator's note.

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actress who played in the silent films of my childhood, and about whom I have forgotten everything except that she was as long as a long evening glove and always a bit weary and always chaste and always married and misunderstood and whom I loved and whose name was Florence.

For the word, which tears the writer of prose away from himself and throws him into the midst of the world, sends back to the poet his own image, like a mirror. This is what justifies the double undertaking of Leiris who, on the one hand, in his *Glossary,* tries to give certain words a *poetic definition,* that is, one which is by itself a synthesis of reciprocal implications between the sonorous body and the verbal soul, and, on the other hand, in a still unpublished work, goes in quest of remembrance of things past, taking as guides a few words which for him are particularly charged with affectivity. Thus, the poetic word is a microcosm.

The crisis of language which broke out at the beginning of this century is a poetic crisis. Whatever the social and historical factors, it manifested itself by attacks of depersonalization of the writer in the face of words. He no longer knew how to use them, and, in Bergson's famous formula, he only half recognized them. He approached them with a completely fruitful feeling of strangeness. They were no longer his; they were no longer he; but in those strange mirrors, the sky, the earth, and his own life were reflected. And, to conclude, they became things themselves, or rather the black heart of things. And when the poet joins several of these microcosms together the case is like that of painters when they assemble their colors on the canvas. One might think that he is composing a sentence, but this is only what it appears to be. He is creating an object. The words-things are grouped by magical associations of fitness and incongruity, like colors and sounds. They attract, repel, and *"burn"* one another, and their association composes the veritable poetic unity which is the *phrase-object.*

More often the poet first has the scheme of the sentence in his mind, and the words follow. But this scheme has nothing in common with what one ordinarily calls a verbal scheme. It does not preside over the construction of a signification. Rather, it is comparable to the creative project by which Picasso, even before touching his brush,

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prefigures in space the *thing* which will become a buffoon or a harlequin.

> *To flee, to flee there, I feel that birds are drunk*
> *But, oh, my heart, hear the song of the sailors.*
>
> (*Fuir, là-bas fuir, je sens que des oiseaux sont ivres*
> *Mais ô mon coeur entends le chant des matelots.*)

This "but" which rises like a monolith at the border of the sentence does not tie the second verse to the preceding one. It colors it with a certain reserved nuance, with "private associations" which penetrate it completely. In the same way, certain poems begin with "and." This conjunction no longer indicates to the mind an operation which is to be carried out; it extends throughout the paragraph to give it the absolute quality of a *sequel.* For the poet, the sentence has a tonality, a taste; by means of it he tastes for their own sake the irritating flavors of objection, of reserve, of disjunction. He carries them to the absolute. He makes them real properties of the sentence, which becomes an utter objection without being an objection *to* anything precise. He finds here those relations of reciprocal implication which we pointed out a short time ago between the poetic word and its meaning; the ensemble of the words chosen functions as an *image* of the interrogative or restrictive nuance, and, inversely, the interrogation is an image of the verbal ensemble which it delimits.

As in the following admirable verses:

> *Oh seasons! Oh castles!*
> *What soul is faultless?*
>
> (*O saisons! O châteaux!*
> *Quelle âme est sans défaut?*)

Nobody is questioned; nobody is questioning; the poet is absent. And the question involves no answer, or rather it is its own answer. Is it therefore a false question? But it would be absurd to believe that Rimbaud "meant" that everybody has his faults. As Breton said of Saint-Pol Roux, "If he had meant it, he would have said it." Nor did he *mean* to say something else. He asked an absolute question. He conferred upon the beautiful word "soul" an interrogative existence. The interrogation has become a thing as the

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anguish of Tintoretto became a yellow sky. It is no longer a signification, but a substance. It is seen from the outside, and Rimbaud invites us to see it from the outside with him. Its strangeness arises from the fact that, in order to consider it, we place ourselves on the other side of the human condition, on the side of God.

If this is the case, one easily understands how foolish it would be to require a poetic engagement. Doubtless, emotion, even passion—and why not anger, social indignation, and political hatred—are at the origin of the poem. But they are not *expressed* there, as in a pamphlet or in a confession. Insofar as the writer of prose exhibits feelings, he illustrates them; whereas, if the poet injects his feelings into his poem, he ceases to recognize them; the words take hold of them, penetrate them, and metamorphose them; they do not signify them, even in his eyes. Emotion has become thing; it now has the opacity of things; it is compounded by the ambiguous properties of the vocables in which it has been enclosed. And above all, there is always much more in each phrase, in each verse, as there is more than simple anguish in the yellow sky over Golgotha. The word, the phrase-thing, inexhaustible as things, everywhere overflow the feeling which has produced them. How can one hope to provoke the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of God a language that has been turned inside out? Someone may say, "You're forgetting the poets of the Resistance. You're forgetting Pierre Emmanuel." Not a bit! They're the very ones I was going to give as examples.[4]

But even if the poet is forbidden to engage himself, is that a reason for exempting the writer of prose? What do they have in common? It is true that the prose-writer writes, and so does the poet. But there is nothing in common between these two acts of writing except for the movement of the hand which traces the letters. Otherwise, their universes are incommunicable, and what is good for one is not for the other. Prose is, in essence, utilitarian. I would readily define the prose-writer as a man who *makes use* of words. M. Jourdan made prose to ask for his slippers, and Hitler to declare war on Poland. The writer is a *speaker*; he designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates. If he does so without

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any effect, he does not therefore become a poet; he is a writer who is talking to say nothing. We have seen enough of language inside out; it is now time to look at it right side out.[5]

The art of prose is employed in discourse; its substance is by nature significative; that is, the words are first of all not objects but designations for objects; it is not first of all a matter of knowing whether they please or displease in themselves, but whether they correctly indicate a certain thing or a certain notion. Thus, it often happens that we find ourselves possessing a certain idea that someone has taught us by means of words without being able to recall a single one of the words which have transmitted it to us.

Prose is first of all an attitude of mind. As Valéry would say, there is prose when the word passes across our gaze as the glass across the sun. When one is in danger or in difficulty he grabs any instrument. When the danger is past, he does not even remember whether it was a hammer or a stick; moreover, he never knew; all he needed was a prolongation of his body, a means of extending his hand to the highest branch. It was a sixth finger, a third leg, in short, a pure function which he assimilated. Thus, regarding language, it is our shell and our antennae; it protects us against others and informs us about them; it is a prolongation of our senses, a third eye which is going to look into our neighbor's heart. We are within language as within our body. We *feel* it spontaneously while going beyond it toward other ends, as we feel our hands and our feet; we perceive it when it is the other who is using it, as we perceive the limbs of others. There is the word which is lived and the word which is met. But in both cases it is in the course of an undertaking, either of me acting upon others, or the other upon me. The word is a certain particular moment of action and has no meaning outside of it. In certain cases of aphasia the possibilities of acting, of understanding situations, and of having normal relations with the other sex, are lost.

At the heart of this apraxia the destruction of language appears only as the collapse of one of the structures, the finest and the most apparent. And if prose is never anything but the privileged instrument of a certain undertaking, if it is only the poet's business to contemplate words in a disinterested fashion, then one has the right to ask the prose-writer from the very start, "What is your aim in writing?

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What undertaking are you engaged in, and why does it require you to have recourse to writing?" In any case this undertaking cannot have pure contemplation as an end. For, intuition is silence, and the end of language is to communicate. One can doubtless *pin down* the results of intuition, but in this case a few words hastily scrawled on the paper will suffice; it will always be enough for the author to recognize what he had in mind. If the words are assembled into sentences, with a concern for clarity, a decision foreign to the intuition, to the language itself, must intervene, the decision of confiding to others the results obtained. In each case one must ask the reason for this decision. And the common sense which our pedants too readily forget never stops repeating it. Are we not in the habit of putting this basic question to young people who are thinking of writing: "Do you have anything to say?" Which means: something which is worth the trouble of being communicated. But what do we mean by something which is "worth the trouble," if it is not by recourse to a system of transcendent values?

Moreover, to consider only this secondary structure of the undertaking, which is what the *verbal moment* is, the serious error of the pure stylists is to think that the word is a gentle breeze which plays lightly over the surface of things, which grazes them without altering them, and that the speaker is a pure *witness* who sums up with a word his harmless contemplation. To speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence.

If you name the behavior of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself. And since you are at the same time naming it to all others, he knows that he is *seen* at the moment he *sees* himself. His furtive gesture which he forgot while he was making it, begins to exist beyond all measure, to exist for everybody; it is integrated into the objective mind; it takes on new dimensions; it is retrieved. After that, how can you expect him to act in the same way? Either he will persist in his behavior out of obstinacy and with full knowledge of what he is doing, or he will give it up. Thus, by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others *in order* to change it. I strike at its very heart, I transpierce it, and I display it in full view; at present I dispose of

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it; with every word I utter, I involve myself a little more in the world, and by the same token I emerge from it a little more, since I go beyond it toward the future.

Thus, the prose-writer is a man who has chosen a certain method of secondary action which we may call action by disclosure. It is therefore permissible to ask him this second question: "What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure? The "engaged" writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change. He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of society and the human condition. Man is the being in the face of whom no being can be impartial, not even God. For God, if he existed, would be, as certain mystics have seen him, in a *situation* in relationship to man. And he is also the being who cannot even see a situation without changing it, for his gaze congeals, destroys, or sculpts, or, as does eternity, changes the object in itself. It is in love, in hate, in anger, in fear, in joy, in indignation, in admiration, in hope, in despair, that man and the world reveal themselves *in their truth*. Doubtless, the engaged writer can be mediocre; he can even be conscious of being so; but as one cannot write without the intention of succeeding perfectly, the modesty with which he envisages his work should not divert him from constructing it *as if* it were to have the greatest celebrity. He should never say to himself, "Bah! I'll be lucky if I have three thousand readers," but rather, "What would happen if everybody read what I wrote?" He remembers what Mosca said, beside the coach which carried Fabrizio and Sanseverina away, "If the word Love comes up between them, I'm lost." He knows that he is the man who names what has not yet been named or what does not dare tell its name. He knows that he makes the word "love" and the word "hate" surge up and with them love and hate between men who had not yet decided upon their feelings. He knows that words, as Brice-Parrain says, are "loaded pistols." If he speaks, he fires. He may be silent, but since he has chosen to fire, he must do it like a man, by aiming at targets, and not like a child, at random, by shutting his eyes and firing merely for the pleasure of hearing the shot go off.

Later on we shall try to determine what the goal of literature

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may be. But from this point on we may conclude that the writer has chosen to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume their full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare. It is assumed that no one is ignorant of the law because there is a code and because the law is written down; thereafter, you are free to violate it, but you know the risks you run. Similarly, the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody might say that he is innocent of what it's all about. And since he has once engaged himself in the universe of language, he can never again pretend that he cannot speak. Once you enter the universe of significations, there is nothing you can do to get out of it. Let words organize themselves freely and they will make sentences, and each sentence contains language in its entirety and refers back to the whole universe. Silence itself is defined in relationship to words, as the pause in music receives its meaning from the groups of notes around it. This silence is a moment of language; being silent is not being dumb; it is to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep on speaking. Thus, if a writer has chosen to remain silent on any aspect whatever of the world, or, according to an expression which says just what it means, to *pass over* it in silence, one has the right to ask him a third question: "Why have you spoken of this rather than that, and—since you speak in order to bring about change—why do you want to change this rather than that?"

All this does not prevent there being a manner of writing. One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way. And, to be sure, the style makes the value of the prose. But it should pass unnoticed. Since words are transparent and since the gaze looks through them, it would be absurd to slip in among them some panes of rough glass. Beauty is in this case only a gentle and imperceptible force. In a painting it shines forth at the very first sight; in a book it hides itself; it acts by persuasion like the charm of a voice or a face. It does not coerce; it inclines a person without his suspecting it, and he thinks that he is yielding to arguments when he is really being solicited by a charm that he does not see. The ceremonial of the mass is not faith; it disposes the harmony of words; their beauty, the balance of the

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phrases, *dispose* the passions of the reader without his being aware and orders them like the Mass, like music, like the dance. If he happens to consider them by themselves, he loses the meaning; there remains only a boring seesaw of phrases.

In prose the aesthetic pleasure is pure only if it is thrown into the bargain. I blush at recalling such simple ideas, but it seems that today they have been forgotten. If that were not the case, would we be told that we are planning the murder of literature, or, more simply, that engagement is harmful to the art of writing? If the contamination of a certain kind of prose by poetry had not confused the ideas of our critics, would they dream of attacking us on the matter of form, when we have never spoken of anything but the content? There is nothing to be said about form in advance, and we have said nothing. Everyone invents his own, and one judges it afterwards. It is true that the subjects suggest the style, but they do not order it. There are no styles ranged a priori outside of the literary art. What is more engaged, what is more boring than the idea of attacking the Jesuits? Yet, out of this Pascal made his *Provincial Letters*. In short, it is a matter of knowing what one wants to write about, whether butterflies or the condition of the Jews. And when one knows, then it remains to decide how one will write about it.

Often the two choices are only one, but among good writers the second choice never precedes the first. I know that Giraudoux has said that "the only concern is finding the style; the idea comes afterwards"; but he was wrong. The idea did not come. On the contrary, if one considers subjects as problems which are always open, as solicitations, as expectations, it will be easily understood that art loses nothing in engagement. On the contrary, just as physics submits to mathematicians new problems which require them to produce a new symbolism, in like manner the always new requirements of the social and the metaphysical engage the artist in finding a new language and new techniques. If we no longer write as they did in the eighteenth century, it is because the language of Racine and Saint-Evrémond does not lend itself to talking about locomotives or the proletariat. After that, the purists will perhaps forbid us to write about locomotives. But art has never been on the side of the purists.

If that is the principle of engagement, what objection can one

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have to it? And above all *what objection has been made to it?* It has seemed to me that my opponents have not had their hearts in their work very much and that their articles contain nothing more than a long scandalized sigh which drags on over two or three columns. I should have liked to know *in the name of what,* with what conception of literature, they condemned engagement. But they have not said; they themselves have not known. The most reasonable thing would have been to support their condemnation on the old theory of art for art's sake. But none of them can accept it. That is also disturbing. We know very well that pure art and empty art are the same thing and that aesthetic purism was a brilliant maneuver of the bourgeois of the last century who preferred to see themselves denounced as Philistines rather than as exploiters. Therefore, they themselves admitted that the writer had to speak about something. But about what? I believe that their embarrassment would have been extreme if Fernandez had not found for them, after the other war, the notion of the *message.* The writer of today, they say, should in no case occupy himself with temporal affairs. Neither should he set up lines without signification nor seek solely beauty of phrase and of imagery. His function is to deliver messages to his readers. Well, what is a message?

It must be borne in mind that most critics are men who have not had much luck and who, just about the time they were growing desperate, found a quiet little job as cemetery watchman. God knows whether cemeteries are peaceful; none of them are more cheerful than a library. The dead are there; the only thing they have done is write. They have long since been washed clean of the sin of living, and besides, their lives are known only through other books which other dead men have written about them. Rimbaud is dead. So are Paterne Berrichon and Isabelle Rimbaud. The troublemakers have disappeared; all that remains are the little coffins that are stacked on shelves along the walls like urns in a columbarium. The critic lives badly; his wife does not appreciate him as she ought to; his children are ungrateful; the first of the month is hard on him. But it is always possible for him to enter his library, take down a book from the shelf, and open it. It gives off a slight odor of the cellar, and a strange operation begins which he has decided to call reading. From

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one point of view it is a possession; he lends his body to the dead in order that they may come back to life. And from another point of view it is a contact with the beyond. Indeed, the book is not at all an object; neither is it an act, nor even a thought. Written by a dead man about dead things, it no longer has any place on this earth; it speaks of nothing which interests us directly. Left to itself, it falls back and collapses; there remain only inkspots on musty paper. And when the critic reanimates these spots, when he makes letters and words of them, they speak to him of passions which he does not feel, of bursts of anger without objects, of dead fears and hopes. It is a whole disincarnated world which surrounds him, where human feelings, because they are no longer affecting, have passed on to the status of exemplary feelings and, in a word, of *values*. So, he persuades himself that he has entered into relations with an intelligible world which is like the truth of his daily sufferings. And their reason for being. He thinks that nature imitates art, as for Plato the world of the senses imitates that of the archetypes. And during the time he is reading, his everyday life becomes an appearance. His nagging wife, his hunchbacked son, they too are appearances. And he will put up with them because Xenophon has drawn the portrait of Xantippe and Shakespeare that of Richard III.

It is a holiday for him when contemporary authors do him the favor of dying. Their books, too raw, too living, too urgent, pass on to the other shore; they become less and less affecting and more and more beautiful. After a short stay in Purgatory they go on to people the intelligible heaven with new values. Bergotte, Swann, Siegfried and Bella, and Monsieur Teste are recent acquisitions. He is waiting for Nathanaël and Ménalque. As for the writers who persist in living, he asks them only not to move about too much, and to make an effort to resemble from now on the dead men they will be. Valéry, who for twenty-five years had been publishing posthumous books, managed the matter very nicely. That is why, like some highly exceptional saints, he was canonized during his lifetime. But Malraux is scandalous.

Our critics are Catharians. They don't want to have anything to do with the real world except eat and drink in it, and since it is absolutely necessary to have relations with our fellow-creatures, they

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have chosen to have them with the defunct. They get excited only about classified matters, closed quarrels, stories whose ends are known. They never bet on uncertain issues, and since history has decided for them, since the objects which terrified or angered the authors they read have disappeared, since bloody disputes seem futile at a distance of two centuries, they can be charmed with balanced periods, and everything happens for them as if all literature were only a vast tautology and as if every new prose-writer had invented a new way of speaking only for the purpose of saying nothing.

To speak of archetypes and "human nature"—is that speaking in order to say nothing? All the conceptions of our critics oscillate from one idea to the other. And, of course, both of them are false. Our great writers wanted to destroy, to edify, to demonstrate. But we no longer hold on to the proofs which they have advanced because we have no concern with what they mean to prove. The abuses which they denounced are no longer those of our time. There are others which stir us up which they did not suspect. History has given the lie to some of their predictions, and those which have been fulfilled became true so long ago that we have forgotten that they were, at first, flashes of their genius. Some of their thoughts are utterly dead, and there are others which the whole human race has taken up to its advantage and which we now regard as commonplaces. It follows that the best arguments of these writers have lost their effectiveness. We admire only their order and rigor. Their most compact composition is in our eyes only an ornament, an elegant architecture of exposition, with no more practical application than such other architectures as the fugues of Bach and the arabesques of the Alhambra.

We are still moved by the passion of these impassioned geometries when the geometry no longer convinces us. Or rather by the representation of the passion. In the course of centuries the ideas have turned flat, but they remain the little personal objectives of a man who was once flesh and bone; behind the reasons of reason, which languish, we perceive the reasons of the heart, the virtues, the vices and that great pain that men have in living. Sade does his best to win us over, but we hardly find him scandalous. He is no longer anything but a soul eaten by a beautiful disease, a pearl-oyster. The *Letter on the Theater* no longer keeps anyone from going to the

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theater, but we find it piquant that Rousseau detested the art of the drama. If we are a bit versed in psychoanalysis, our pleasure is perfect. We shall explain the *Social Contract* by the Oedipus complex and *The Spirit of the Laws* by the inferiority complex. That is, we shall fully enjoy the well-known superiority of live dogs to dead lions. Thus, when a book presents befuddled thoughts which appear to be reasons only to melt under scrutiny and to be reduced to heart beats, when the teaching that one can draw from it is radically different from what its author intended, the book is called a message. Rousseau, the father of the French Revolution, and Gobineau, the father of racism, both sent us messages. And the critic considers them with equal sympathy. If they were alive, he would have to choose between the two, to love one and hate the other. But what brings them together, above all, is that they are both profoundly and deliciously wrong, and in the same way: they are dead.

Thus, contemporary writers should be advised to deliver messages, that is, voluntarily to limit their writing to the involuntary expression of their souls. I say involuntary because the dead, from Montaigne to Rimbaud, have painted themselves completely, but without having meant to—it is something they have simply thrown into the bargain. The surplus which they have given us without thinking should be the primary and professed goal of living writers. They are not to be forced to give us confessions without any dressing, nor are they to abandon themselves to the too-naked lyricism of the romantics. But since we find pleasure in foiling the ruses of Chateaubriand or Rousseau, in surprising them in the secret places of their being at the moment they are playing at being the public man, in distinguishing the private motives from their most universal assertions, we shall ask newcomers to procure us this pleasure deliberately. So let them reason, assert, deny, refute, and prove; but the cause they are defending must be only the apparent aim of their discourse; the deeper goal is to yield themselves without seeming to do so. They must first disarm themselves of their arguments as time has done for those of the classic writers; they must bring them to bear upon subjects which interest no one or on truths so general that readers are convinced in advance. As for their ideas, they must give them an air of profundity, but with an effect of emptiness, and they must shape them in such a way that

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they are obviously explained by an unhappy childhood, a class hatred, or an incestuous love. Let them not presume to think in earnest; thought conceals the man, and it is the man alone who interests us. A bare tear is not lovely. It offends. A good argument also offends, as Stendhal well observed. But an argument that masks a tear—that's what we're after. The argument removes the obscenity from the tears; the tears, by revealing their origin in the passions, remove the aggressiveness from the argument. We shall be neither too deeply touched nor at all convinced, and we shall be able to yield ourselves in security to that moderate pleasure which, as everyone knows, we derive from the contemplation of works of art. Thus, this is "true," "pure" literature, a subjectivity which yields itself under the aspect of the objective, a discourse so curiously contrived that it is equivalent to silence, a thought which debates with itself, a reason which is only the mask of madness, an Eternal which lets it be understood that it is only a moment of history, a historical moment which, by the hidden side which it reveals, suddenly sends back a perpetual lesson to the eternal man, but which is produced against the express wishes of those who do the teaching.

When all is said and done, the message is a soul which is made object. A soul, and what is to be done with a soul? One contemplates it at a respectful distance. It is not customary to show one's soul in society without an imperious motive. But, with certain reserves, convention permits some individuals to put theirs into commerce, and all adults may procure it for themselves. For many people today, works of the mind are thus little straying souls which one acquires at a modest price; there is good old Montaigne's, dear La Fontaine's, and that of Jean-Jacques and of Jean-Paul and of delicious Gérard. What is called literary art is the ensemble of the treatments which make them inoffensive. Tanned, refined, chemically treated, they provide their acquirers with the opportunity of devoting some moments of a life completely turned outward to the cultivation of subjectivity. Custom guarantees it to be without risk. Montaigne's skepticism? Who can take it seriously since the author of the *Essays* got frightened when the plague ravaged Bordeaux? Or Rousseau's humanitarianism, since "Jean-Jacques" put his children into an orphanage? And the strange revelations of *Sylvie,* since Gérard de Nerval was mad? At

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the very most, the professional critic will set up infernal dialogues between them and will inform us that French thought is a perpetual colloquy between Pascal and Montaigne. In so doing he has no intention of making Pascal and Montaigne more alive, but of making Malraux and Gide more dead. Finally, when the internal contradictions of the life and the work have made both of them useless, when the message, in its imponderable depth, has taught us these capital truths, "that man is neither good nor bad," "that there is a great deal of suffering in human life," "that genius is only great patience," this melancholy cuisine will have achieved its purpose, and the reader, as he lays down the book, will be able to cry out with a tranquil soul, "All this is only literature."

But since, for us, writing is an enterprise; since writers are alive before being dead; since we think that we must try to be as right as we can in our books; and since, even if the centuries show us to be in the wrong, this is no reason to show in advance that we are wrong; since we think that the writer should engage himself completely in his works, and not as an abject passivity by putting forward his vices, his misfortunes, and his weaknesses, but as a resolute will and as a choice, as this total enterprise of living that each one of us is, it is then proper that we take up this problem at its beginning and that we, in our turn, ask ourselves: "*Why* does one write?"

1. At least in general. The greatness and error of Klee lie in his attempt to make a painting both sign and object.

2. I say "create," not "imitate," which is enough to annihilate the bombast of M. Charles Estienne who has obviously not understood a word of my argument and who is dead set on tilting at shadows.

3. This is the example cited by Bataille in *Inner Experience*.

4. If one wishes to know the origin of this attitude toward language, the following are a few brief indications.

Originally, poetry creates the *myth*, while the prose-writer draws its *portrait*. In reality, the human act, governed by needs and urged on by the useful is, in a sense, a *means*. It passes unnoticed, and it is the result which counts. When I extend my hand *in order to* take up my pen, I have only a fleeting and obscure consciousness of my gesture; it is the pen which I see. Thus, man is alienated by his ends. Poetry reverses the relationship: the world and things become inessential, become a pretext for the act which becomes its own end. The vase is there so that the girl may perform the graceful act of filling it; the Trojan War, so that Hector and Achilles may engage in that heroic combat. The action, detached

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from its goals, which become blurred, becomes an act of prowess or a dance. Nevertheless, however indifferent he might have been to the success of the enterprise, the poet, before the nineteenth century, remained in harmony with society as a whole. He did not use language for the end which prose seeks, but he had the same confidence in it as the prose-writer.

With the coming of bourgeois society, the poet puts up a common front with the prose-writer to declare it unlivable. His job is always to create the myth of man, but he passes from white magic to black magic. Man is always presented as the absolute end, but by the success of his enterprise he is sucked into a utilitarian collectivity. The thing that is in the background of his act and that will allow transition to the myth is thus no longer success, but defeat. By stopping the infinite series of his projects like a screen, a defeat alone returns him to himself in his purity. The world remains the inessential, but it is now there as a pretext for defeat. The finality of the thing is to send man back to himself by blocking the route. Moreover, it is not a matter of arbitrarily introducing defeat and ruin into the course of the world, but rather of having no eyes for anything but that. Human enterprise has two aspects: it is both success and failure. The dialectical schema is inadequate for reflecting upon it. We must make our vocabulary and the frames of our reason more supple. Some day I am going to try to describe that strange reality, History, which is neither objective, nor ever quite subjective, in which the dialectic is contested, penetrated, and corroded by a kind of anti-dialectic, but which is still a dialectic. But that is the philosopher's affair. One does not ordinarily consider the two faces of Janus; the man of action sees one and the poet sees the other. When the instruments are broken and unusable, when plans are blasted and effort is useless, the world appears with a childlike and terrible freshness, without supports, without paths. It has the maximum reality because it is crushing for man, and as action, in any case, generalizes, defeat restores to things their individual reality. But, by an expected reversal, the defeat, considered as a final end, is both a contesting and an appropriation of this universe. A contesting, because man *is worth more* than that which crushes; he no longer contests things in their "little bit of reality," like the engineer or the captain, but, on the contrary, in their "too full of reality," by his very existence as a vanquished person; he is the remorse of the world. An appropriation, because the world, by ceasing to be the tool of success, becomes the instrument of failure. So there it is, traversed by an obscure finality; it is its coefficient of adversity which serves, the more human insofar as it is more hostile to man. The defeat itself turns into salvation. Not that it makes us yield to some "beyond," but by itself it shifts and is metamorphosed. For example, poetic language rises out of the ruins of prose. If it is true that the word is a betrayal and that communication is impossible, then each word by itself recovers its individuality and becomes an instrument of our defeat and a receiver of the incommunicable. It is not that there is *another thing* to communicate; but the communication of prose having miscarried, it is the very meaning of the word which becomes the pure incommunicable. Thus, the failure of communication becomes a suggestion of the incommunicable, and the thwarted project of utilizing words is succeeded by the pure disinterested intuition of the word. Thus, we again meet with the description which we attempted earlier in this study, but in the more general perspective of the absolute valorization of the defeat, which seems to me the original attitude of contemporary poetry. Note also that this choice confers upon the poet a very precise function in the collectivity: in a highly integrated or religious society, the defeat is masked by the State or redeemed by Religion; in a less integrated and secular society, such as our democracies, it is up to poetry to redeem them.

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Poetry is a case of the loser winning. And the genuine poet chooses to lose, even if he has to go so far as to die, in order to win. I repeat that I am talking of contemporary poetry. History presents other forms of poetry. It is not my concern to show their connection with ours. Thus, if one absolutely wishes to speak of the engagement of the poet, let us say that he is the man who engages himself to lose. This is the deeper meaning of that tough-luck, of that malediction with which he always claims kinship and which he always attributes to an intervention from without, where as it is his deepest choice, the source, and not the consequence, of his poetry. He is certain of the total defeat of the human enterprise and arranges to fail in his own life in order to bear witness, by his individual defeat, to human defeat in general. Thus, he contests, as we shall see, which is what the prose-writer does too. But the contesting of prose is carried on in the name of a greater success; and that of poetry, in the name of the hidden defeat which every victory conceals.

5. It goes without saying that in all poetry a certain form of prose, that is, of success, is present; and, vice-versa, the driest prose always contains a bit of poetry, that is, a certain form of defeat; no prose-writer is *quite* capable of expressing what he wants to say; he says too much or not enough; each phrase is a wager, a risk assumed; the more cautious one is, the more attention the word attracts; as Valéry has shown, no one can understand a word to its very bottom. Thus, each word is used simultaneously for its clear and social meaning and for certain obscure resonances—let me say, almost for its physiognomy. The reader, too, is sensitive to this. At once we are no longer on the level of concerted communication, but on that of grace and chance; the silences of prose are poetic because they mark its limits, and it is for the purpose of greater clarity that I have been considering the extreme cases of pure prose and pure poetry. However, it need not be concluded that we can pass from poetry to prose by a continuous series of intermediate forms. If the prose writer is too eager to fondle his words, the *eidos* of "prose" is shattered and we fall into highfalutin nonsense. If the poet relates, explains, or teaches, the poetry becomes *prosaic;* he has lost the game. It is a matter of complex structures, impure, but well-defined.

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LONDON LETTER

Dear Editors: To start for once in a poetic vein:

> The realization of the Labour dream
> Bewilders even well-informed spectators
> Who say, when in Great Britain on a visit,
> "This can't be Revolution, but what is it?"*

What, indeed, is it? To make the puzzle more interesting, I will put it this way: "Why would the present writer, in the third year of the reign of British Socialism, consider himself a happy man if he had an ailing grandmother of the Catholic faith?" Answer: "Because if he had one, the Government would give him petrol to drive her once a week to mass to the nearest Catholic church, which happens to be in Bangor, fifty miles away, and in this manner he would be able to go places and see the world." Even an Anglican, or even a Wesleyan, ailing relative would help, though their respective churches are nearer and would mean less petrol. However, as I am not possessed of the requisite kinsfolk, and am not a church-goer myself, my position is as follows. At the end of this month the petrol ration will be abolished. I live in the Welsh hills, one mile from the next cross-country bus-stop; there are no buses after 9 p.m., and none on Sunday. The nearest shopping center, the cinema, railway station, etc., are a further two miles away. I may, if I am lucky, obtain a special allowance to go shopping twice a week. But *only* shopping. I shall have no right to use my few drops of shopping petrol to see a friend, go to the cinema, or have a meal out. Every policeman is in duty bound to report me if he sees my car, moving or stationary, at any place outside the shortest line connecting my domicile with the nearest shops. This means that during the whole winter my wife and I shall be unable to visit friends, to go to a restaurant, cinema, theater, lecture, or concert. Let that sink in before you read on.

Now substitute for "I" several hundred thousand people who live

* From Sagittarius' brilliant political satire: *Let Cowards Flinch*, published by the Turnstile Press, London, 1947.—A. K.

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in the country with equally inadequate transport facilities. All of them are, at least for the winter season when it gets dark early, practically cut off from social and cultural life; in fact, under a kind of curfew or house arrest. But on Sunday, they can drive to the church parade. That a socialist government should regard church-going as more essential than lectures, theaters, meetings, etc., is a phenomenon on a par with their sabotaging of book production—for there is no other word to qualify a policy of cutting publishers' paper and printers' power allocations to an extent which deprives young authors of practically any chance of having their books accepted, and which makes classics, schoolbooks, and scientific works almost impossible to come by.

This, however, is a side issue. The social aspect of the abolition of private motoring is much more interesting, for it is symbolic of the general attitude and policy of the Labour regime. Let me try to analyze one or two of its various implications. First, the economic side. The Government pretends that it will save around forty million dollars worth of imported petrol. Its critics, including those within the Labour Party, say it will save less than twenty million. So far, in economic matters, the critics have usually been right and the Government spokesmen wrong. At any rate, even according to the Government's own estimate, the paralyzing of the country's transportation will contribute just about 1% (one per cent) towards bridging the export gap. The Government further admits that the loss of internal revenue (car-tax) will far exceed the amount saved; but, they say, as taxes are paid in sterling and not in dollars, that does not matter. At the same time the autumn budget further increases purchase-tax and doubles profits-tax to combat inflationary tendencies. But the contradiction between the Government's economic and its financial policy is nothing new, so this again is a side issue. It is further officially admitted that a mass of garage mechanics, petrol-pump men, etc., will become unemployed. That again does not matter; they will be "absorbed" in more productive industries. "Absorbed" is a nice, functional word; the problem of how to make families migrate from areas of local unemployment to those of acute manpower shortage, further complicated by the dreadful housing problem, is not apparent in it. Nor the slight inconvenience that, once motoring is re-established, all these people will have to be de-absorbed and re-migrated. In short, for the sake of saving 5 to 10 pro mille of its dollar deficit, the Government paralyzes private transport, puts an additional burden on already overcrowded public transport, forsakes an important item of its revenue, dislocates a nation-wide essential industry, deprives a whole

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layer of the population of all social and cultural amenities, and infuriates the middle, lower-middle, and upper-working classes to an extent of which Labour's smashing defeat in the municipal elections is a significant measure. It is the well-known policy of spending a pound to save a penny.

Politically, the abolition of private motoring looks at first sight like an ultra-left measure. At a time when the working man's main calorie-providing and belly-filling foodstuffs are rationed to one small potato per meal or one big potato per day, a few slices of bread, two rashers of bacon per week, and so on, let us at least, so the argument runs, demonstrate to the working classes that we mean to hit the rich equally hard by depriving them of their motor cars. Even if the economic value of the measure is dubious, it will lift the working man's morale. In fact, there is good reason to believe that propagandistic considerations of this kind played an important part in the decision of our Westminster Jacobins. If that is the case, it is a further indication of their loss of touch with social reality and the mood of the country. For those who (apart from doctors, etc.) will still be able to drive about in their cars are precisely the rich, and the category of people who in the eyes of the working man are the direct representatives of the ruling class. In rural districts the squire has his farming allowance, and will be seen driving about the countryside as before, by using the simple dodge of putting a sack of potatoes or pig-food into the dicky to prove that he is on some farming errand. In industrial areas the directors, managers, executives, etc. will have their business allowance; add to these the bureaucrats of the Ministries, Controls, Coal Boards, Regional Industrial Boards, and whatever they are called, and you will find that from the point of view of the working man-in-the-street it is still "they" who flit past him in their cars on their various "essential pursuits." And if your little man-in-the-street happens to be a skilled factory worker with a motor bike, a shopkeeper or artisan in proud possession of an old secondhand Austin Seven, or a young mechanic who has built himself a jeep from army scrap, then the effect will be directly the opposite of that at which the Government was aiming. In fact, it is. It pushes the upper stratum of the working class and the lower stratum of the middle class off the roads, and leaves the ruling bureaucracy, technocracy, and plutocracy in sole possession of them. Finished the little man's family outing on Sunday afternoon in the rickety ark crammed with children, picnic gear, and dogs; finished the bridal rides on the motor bike, the young working man's vehicle of romance and adventure. The last bit

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of fun has been exiled from their drab lives in this country of Virtue and Gloom, with its mean, vindictive WORK OR WANT posters on every street-corner: a slogan fit for a state orphanage or reformatory school, and which makes every self-respecting worker's stomach turn in disgust.

And so the massacre of incentives continues. And as the incentives to work vanish, curious psychological symptoms make their appearance. One is the wave of what one might call "psychological strikes." They are neither economic strikes for higher wages, nor political strikes; they are spontaneous outbursts of ill-temper and irritation, sometimes for the silliest causes (as the recent hotel-strike), and frequently directed against the inept bureaucracy of nationalized industries (as the recent Yorkshire coal-strikes). A different symptom, but fed from the same psychological sources, is that new social phenomenon, the "spiv"—an English compromise between the harmless work-shy loafer and the gangster-racketeer. According to official estimates, there are now more than a quarter of a million spivs who evade registration at the Labour Exchanges, run the black market, and keep the crime squads busy; and their number is steadily growing. So is the black market; a year ago Britain could be rightly proud of being the one belligerent country whose black market was almost negligible. Today this is no longer the case; the farmers have started illegally slaughtering their cattle, just as in France, and the Ministry of Food has recently admitted that it was unable to stop the racket. These and many other symptoms point to a considerable slackening of the moral fiber of the country—a direct consequence of its being starved of the morale vitamins of inspiration, incentives, hope. Most curious among these psychological phenomena is the unparalleled betting mania which sweeps the country; apart from the traditional football pools, from horses and dogs, people bet on the most idiotic subjects: the last digit on a tramway-card, the first letter in the headline of the evening paper, etc. The stakes are negligible; it is not the money which matters. It is the craving for a little fun and excitement in this joy-starved country.

I am dwelling on these factors at such length, because I am convinced that the problem of incentives is the most important and most difficult problem of socialist economy. Elsewhere I have tried to show that the breakdown of socialism in Russia is primarily due to the breakdown of the revolutionary incentives and the consequent necessity of replacing them by the old incentives—chauvinism, panslavism, leader-worship, forced labor, suppression of strikes, inheritance, class-privileges, etc. To British socialism, which is reformist and gradualist, the problem

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of incentives presents itself in a different form and not as overtly as was the case after a total bolshevik revolution; but it is equally decisive for its success or failure. As Labour policy in the nationalized and controlled industries is incomparably more equalitarian, democratic, and economically "leftist" than the policy of the Stalin regime, it can have no recourse to the fantastic wage-differentiations, Stakhanovite privileges, exploitation, and terror which keep Soviet industry going. Nor can it offer the straight capitalist incentives of material betterment, reinforced by fear of unemployment, which operate in American industry. This is the real predicament of British social democracy—and of every social democratic regime which, as I tried to show in my first letter, must almost inevitably inherit countries handed over by the former ruling class in a state of virtual bankruptcy. Only an exceptional imaginative effort could enable the Labour Government to solve this problem; the instilling of a true revolutionary consciousness into the masses; a much greater share of initiative and responsibility invested, not in the bureaucratic bodies of the national Trade Unions, but in the men in the workshops; together with the organization of workers' clubs, holiday camps, and other forms of recreation; in other words, the stimulation of political consciousness and joy of life. Instead of which, the people get WORK OR WANT posters, unctuous sermons, and the death-sentence of the motor bike.

> The Cabinet takes Britain in its keeping
> In working partnership with sons of toil,
> But there's the rub—those partners now are sleeping,
> The revolution has gone off the boil,
> The plebs have lost that hectic *joie-de-vivre*
> That goes with revolutionary fever.

Two more years of this, and Labour will have irretrievably wasted its historic chance, and will have gone the way of the German, Austrian, and French social-democratic parties.

The fatal pattern of these continental precedents is equally discernible in Labour's attitude towards the upper and the middle classes. The Weimar Republic had sufficiently scared the Junkers and the Ruhr industrialists to make them her mortal enemies; as it kept on provoking them with pinpricks but forgot to break the backbone of their power, its end was inevitable. Much the same happened in Austria, and in the France of the Popular Front. With local variations it is always the same distressing spectacle. The young matador enters the arena, bows to the

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enthusiastic tribunes, flaunts his red cape before the bull until the beast gets raving mad; then, in the decisive moment, it appears that he has left his sword at home, and he is carried out on a stretcher, past the booing crowd which throws cushions and rotten eggs at him.

In other words, a socialist government cannot escape the fatal choice either to break the power of the old ruling classes, or to come to a modus vivendi with them. Every single social-democratic movement in Europe which has come to power since 1918 has tried to evade this choice, and each fell victim to its attempt at evasion. It can be argued against this that British social history is a succession of unique compromises. But the geographical, political, and psychological factors which account for this development have ceased to exist, and the belief in the miraculous healing power of the "British compromise"—between the coal miners and the City, between internationalism and the Foreign Office—is on a par with the belief in the unchangeable value of Dreadnoughts, and of homemade herbal cures against radioactive clouds.

The dilemma of how to deal with the bull without resorting to radical means is inherent in the dilemma of social-democratic reformism. In this respect, the predicament of British Labour is merely a particular example of the predicament of democratic socialism in general, and the muddled policy of the Government may partly be regarded as a consequence of the inadequacy and datedness of socialist doctrine itself. But no such excuse can be claimed for the treatment of the petite bourgeoisie —the storekeeper, artisan, small businessman, white-collar worker. The requirements of socialist policy towards this amorphous, politically opportunistic mass, with its decisive influence on public atmosphere and opinion, and its decisive "floating vote," are clear and unambiguous: they have to be won, brought over to the side of the People, to which they belong. Experience both on the Continent and in this country has proved that the industrial working class alone, without middle-class support, can neither obtain a stable parliamentary majority, nor the necessary favorable *ambiance* of the street; it cannot govern. That is why the results of the last municipal elections are so significant and distressing. That Labour lost two-thirds of the contested seats could be regarded as a mere momentary oscillation of the political barometer—were it not for the way in which they lost them. The elections were fought not on the lines of municipal, but of national politics, for or against the Labour Government. In consequence, the percentage of voters reached the record figure (for municipal elections) of 56%; that is 13%, or round two million voters, more than last year. Among

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these two million new voters, who had previously been politically indifferent, round half a million voted for Labour, and round a million and a half voted for the Conservatives or for Independents supported by the Conservatives. In other words, one quarter for the Government, three quarters against it. The petrol issue, kill-joy austerity, bureaucratic chicane, exasperation at the nagging schoolmastery of ministerial exhortations, has achieved the miracle of waking up the lethargic, a-political little man and shaking him into action—against the Government.

To all this the staunch Labour supporter will answer that the Government has no choice, that all its actions are rigidly determined by Tory mismanagement in the past, by the dollar shortage, and the export gap. It would be foolish to deny the extremely heavy economic odds against which the Government is battling; it is equally foolish and irresponsible to use facts, which were just as well-known in 1945 when Labour fought its electoral campaign, as an over-all alibi for the subjective ineptitude of, say, Shinwell's fuel policy last winter, or the symbolic lunacy of the abolition of motoring, or Bevin's amok-run on Palestine. In my first letter to you (March-April, 1946, issue) I tried to show that this Government, like any other, had a wide elbow-room of subjective freedom for maneuvering within the hard limits set by objective conditions; and that goes for all fields of activity, from economics to public relations. It is characteristic of the mediocre person, that in a crisis he will carry on doggedly along one fixed line—because he lacks imaginative resources, and has to make a show of strength to hide his weakness. The dragging of the Exodus refugees from Haifa to Marseilles, and then on to Hamburg, in the teeth of the protests and laughter of the world, was a typical example of the spend-a-pound-to-save-a-penny policy. The same obstinacy characterizes the regime's economic policy. We could get food from soft-currency countries in Europe in exchange for industrial products, if the Government were willing or able to guarantee quantities and dates of delivery. But this they wouldn't do, for it would mean going just one step farther in the direction and control of export industries than the rigidly fixed line of democratic planning permits. Ergo: one potato per man a day, and death to his motor bike; and if snooty critics think they know better—let's silence them with another reference to the Tory mismanagement of coal mines in the thirties, the cold spell of last winter, and statistics about the export gap.

In that first letter I wrote to you that after eighteen months of

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Labour rule it was too early to draw conclusions. Today, in the third year of the regime, it is becoming clear that it is squandering at a rapid pace the good will of the electorate, the benevolent neutrality of the common man in this country, and the sympathy and hopes of the European Left. If, within the next year, the Labour movement still retains sufficient vitality to change its leadership, both in spirit and in body, the downhill trend may still be halted; if not, 1950 will see the Conservative Party, perhaps reinforced by a few neo-Macdonaldites, reinstated in power. The British Labour victory was the last chance of the social democratic movement in our time; if it is lost, it means that a Tory England allied to a Gaullist France will, for better or worse, tackle the European problem which socialism has been unable to solve.

Arthur Koestler

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Allen Tate

THE EYE

to E. E. Cummings

I see the horses and the sad streets
Of my childhood in an agate eye
Roving, under the clean sheets,
Over a black hole in the sky.

The ill man is only the child,
The evil man becomes the lover;
The natural man with evil roiled
Pulls down the sphereless sky for cover.

I see the gray heroes and the graves
Of my childhood in the nuclear eye—
Horizons spent in dun caves
Sucked down into the sinking sky.

The happy child becomes the man,
The elegant man becomes the mind,
The fathered gentleman who can
Perform quick feats of gentle kind.

I see the long field and the noon
Of my childhood in the carbolic eye,
Dissolving pupil of the moon
Seared from the raveled hole of the sky.

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The nice ladies and gentlemen,
The teaser and the jelly-bean
Play cockalorum-and-the-hen
When the cool afternoons pour green:

I see the father and the cooling cup
Of my childhood in the swallowing sky
Down, down, until down is up
And there is nothing in the eye,

Shut shutter of the mineral man
Who takes the fatherless dark to bed,
The acid sky to the brain-pan;
And calls the crows to peck his head.

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William Gibson

LETTERS TO MY WITCH

1. BOULDER

I could say once my hand dug me news,
And was glad in the rock;
The aspens were food to my knuckle,
The far gorgehead snows

Were a well in my palm, and glee roared
Where ledgefalls dived;
For my digger swore witness that love
Was a wind in my ear:

Now the rocks sit broken like eggshells,
And a great bird is flown.
Time to wither my hand as a touchstone.
Whose am I, love,

That love can be hard as a boulder
And bulk in my throat,
And my mountains you witched into motes
On my eyeball, cajoler?

2. LODESTONE

Now is the day when the boulder is halved,
And its lodes are divorced.
I snap in the graveyards of forests the oddities
Woodlike and mossed,

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Elk come apart: and could sit in the great hand
Of pine roots let go
Of the earth, in their lax dissolution out of
That marriage: and toe

The gravel slid footloose by tons in each gorge
Where rock steeple and dome
Soar in witless dismemberment. All lie becalmed,
Unleagued, and at home:

But what sinew or unearthly rootbind is on us,
What is our iron
Of halves out of wedlock at groan to cleave,
More apart, more malign?

3. BEDROCK

I went into the haunch of the forest, tangled in root scrawl,
In log reach and fern snare,
And stood in the manna of leperheart toadstools: but lodes,
Unmined, I heard call

In the floor of decay, and I came to the backbone reef
Of bedrock. I went up
In the desert of rocks above timber to wait out of woodrot
And hearsay of leaf,

Where boulderfield rockbrawl of whaleback tombslab on tombslab
Of mountainhead doombreak
Swarmed to my hips: and I heard on each rockface the lichen
Unpeel like a scab,

But beneath the big golgotha crawl felt the monolith pull
Of the bedrock. I went down
In the belly of gorges by cataract rockfall and fir ledge
Under headrock and skull

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To the maidenhead lakes, perennials, thronged by a rout
Of moss-niche rillets
Giggling from snowhang and glacier, green brimful dwellers
But flowing out, flowing out

Of lakeself with cries of creekfall and quicksilver sluice
Sidling over the iron
Of bedrock. Turn where I would, the land spoke me of love
And disasters. Footloose

I came, in an ebb-slide country that crawled under toehold
And slagged over heelmark,
But slipshod by misstep, wrist-deep in the runnels of shale
And the windlift of mould,

I fell upon rockbottom ore, and my roots fixed in wedlock
With stone: until stone slide
In landgive, and iron be halved, and you, I, and all
Go down to the bedrock.

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Randall Jarrell

MONEY

I sit here eating milk-toast in my lap-robe—
They've got my nightshirt starchier than I told 'em . . . Huh! . . .
I'll tell 'em. . . .
Why, I wouldn't have given
A wooden nickel to a wooden Indian, when I began.
I never gave a soul a cent that I could help
That I remember; now I sit here hatching checks
For any mortal cause that writes in asking,
And look or don't look—I've been used to 'em too long—
At seven Corots and the Gobelins
And my first Rembrandt I outbid Clay Frick for:
A dirty Rembrandt bought with dirty money—
But nowadays we've all been to the cleaners'.
(Harriet'd call Miss Tarbell Old Tarbaby—
It none of it will stick, she'd say when I got mad;
And she was right. She always was.)
I used to say I'd made my start in railroads
—"Stocks, that is," I'd think and never say—
And made my finish in philanthropy:
To think that all along it'uz Service!
I could have kicked myself right in the face
To think I didn't think of that myself. . . .
"There isn't one of you that couldn't have done what I did—"
That was *my* line; and I'd think: "if you'd been me."
SEES U.S. LAND OF OPPORTUNITY,
A second-page two-column headline,
Was all I got, most years.

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They never knew a thing!

Why, when I think of what I've done, I can't believe it!

. . . A Presbyterian'd say it's Providence.
In my time I've bought the whole Rhode Island Legislature
For—I disremember how much; what for too.
Harriet'd have Nellie Melba in
To entertain our friends—it never entertained *me* none—
And I'd think: "Birdie, I could buy you
The way you'd buy a piece of Melba toast."

I had my troubles—nothing money wouldn't cure.
A percentage of the world resented me
There on my money bags in my silk hat.
(To hear Ward I'd still straw stuck in my fur.)
But in the end the money reconciled 'em all.
Don't someone call it the Great Reconciler?
When my boys dynamited thirteen trestles
On the New York Central, I went against my custom then
And told the papers: "Money's a *responsibility.*"

*I'*d talk down money if I hadn't any. As it was,
The whole office force could hear me through two doors.
E. J. said they said: "Listen to the Old Man go!"

Why, it was money
That got me shut of my poor trusting wife,
And bought my girl from her, and got me Harriet—
What else would Harriet have married *me* for? . . . She's gone now
And they're gone too, but it's not gone. . . .
You can take it with you anywhere *I'*m going.

. . . While I was looking up my second son-in-law
In Dun and Bradstreet, the social secretary
Came on him in the *Almanach de Gotha.*
It was like I figured, though: he didn't take.

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You couldn't tell my grandson from a Frenchman.

And Senators! . . .
I never saw the man I couldn't buy.

When my Ma died I boarded with a farmer
In the next county; I used to think of her,
And I looked round me, as I could,
And I saw what it added up to: money.
Now I'm dying—I can't call this living—
I haven't any cause to change my mind.
They say that money isn't everything; it isn't;
Money don't help you none when you are sighing
For something else in this wide world to buy. . . .
The first time I couldn't think of anything
I didn't have, it shook me.
But giving does as well.

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Leslie A. Fiedler

THE TEETH

Children, dogs unnerved him. And the sun, inimical (he had forgotten his dark glasses, of course), found the narrow treeless gap of the street, his pale watery eyes. It was the last anguish of the sun, Warren knew, but the motionless coming of dark would be no better; open windows and the noise of fans would not tease from the brown, fading air—coolness; and faces all night, leaning from windows, would breathe out, audibly and with effort, the pulse of their sleeplessness.

Meanwhile, they were all outside: the shrill kids and runty dogs (but their shrillness broke against the persistence of heat), the shirtless fathers watching the brief rest of their hairy arms, the flushed women in doorways, their supper dishes done, not daring to think yet—sleep.

It was as if the airless houses had been turned inside out, and Warren had the sense of trespassing before each stoop; a hundred privacies gave sullenly before his invasion. Each time, the children would stand fixed in the attitudes of their interrupted play, grudge insolently his passage, forcing him to brush against their sweaty shoulders—and then, behind him, the sound of the ball, the scuffling breaths, the cries. And the warm parents would raise toward him their eyes, indolent, curious; their faces would turn toward his coming, hold him in precise focus as he passed their doorway, follow his back until his going released them to weariness or whatever dream survived the atrocious summer.

He had the feeling that they mocked him in whispers: his stooped shoulders, his finicky gait, the flickering gestures that he could not suppress as he debated with himself his venture; and he began to limp a little to confound their contempt, compel pity. It was

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still near enough to the war's ending so that they might think. . . . With his reverie, his limp had grown more exaggerated until he rolled grotesquely on the tide of evasion and self-pity; but he became suddenly aware of another stare, incurious, mocking surely, almost malicious.

It was a boy, fourteen, perhaps fifteen, who leaned against the railing between sidewalk and house, resting; his mouth had dropped open and his unnoticed breath broke from it dog-like *hunh! hunh! hunh!* Each of his arms was humped backwards over a rail, his head dangling limply on to his chest between shoulders thrust up and forward so that he might have been a hunchback; it was impossible to say for sure. But the metal leg-braces, all fluid and luminous in the last sun, and the surgical shoes were unambiguous. This Warren could not hope to deceive; he blushed.

"Hey mister, gimme a nickel, mister!" The boy called the words casually, almost mumbled them, turning his head oddly up against Warren's face from beneath, and reaching one cupped hand forward without releasing his arm from the supporting stake. How he exploits his distortion, Warren thought, as if he had invented it, and not merely suffered it as an affliction. "Obscenity!" he told himself and he did not waver.

"Hey mister, mister!" A little louder now, so that Warren could not longer pretend he did not hear. Just beneath his own face swam the face of the real cripple, blurred from focus, but the sweat visible, the fat quivering tongue, the knowledge of his fraud. He knew!

"Gimme a nickel, mister!" the dim face insisted (not begging now, *demanding*) and one eye winked, wrinkled in mocking complicity. Warren walked away from the boy, faster, faster, forgetting to limp in his embarrassment; and then, sensing that to leave off would seem a confession, a surrender to that petty blackmail, threw himself again into his burlesque gimpy gait. Behind him he could hear the creak of leather, the ticking of metal against the pavement, as the boy took up the chase: "Hey, mister, gimme a nickel! Hey mister!"

Warren did not look around, but he could feel the absurdity of the scene, man and boy, parodying each other down the street that swarmed and closed about their strange intimacy. Who was the

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mocker, who mocked in that lopsided pursuit, he could no longer tell. Someone laughed and he began to tremble. In a moment the cripple would touch him.

He almost yielded then, paid for the offensive coincidence the price named; but when he wheeled nervously, a nickel in his hand, the boy automatically winced, ducking behind the protective crook of an elbow. Warren had not intended violence, but he could not refuse the cue of that habitual response. "Get the hell out of here!" he shouted in his thin, tremulous voice. "Go on! Beat it!"

It sounded in his own ears as if he were reading someone else's lines, but the cripple stopped short, swaying against the palpable closing dark. "A penny, mister. Oney a penny, mister."

"Beat it!" Warren yelled, furious at the whole comedy, his fraud and shame, and now the uncustomary bout of violence in the unmitigated heat, "or I'll call a cop."

"Awrr," the boy said retreating slowly, "I didn't do nothing."

And Warren moved from him, his head jerking with the renewed emphasis of his limp, almost jaunty (a sense of victory moved him dimly) against what was now night; but his hands trembled and the nickel slipped from his damp fingers into the shadowy gutter. The boy, humped again over the railing, did not notice.

Out of the cripple's sight, Warren stopped to mop his forehead, the backs of his hands, his neck with a large white handkerchief that he flung from him abruptly, disgusted with its dampness. His heart thumped idiotically in the interior dark of his breast; he felt its blind thud with the gesture of one about to sing. "Imprecise engine," he addressed it secretly, "knock it off!" Looking closely, one could have seen his lips move, but the casual watcher noted only the operatic gesture without context. "Thumper, thumper, be through!" he concluded and spat into the friendly rubble beside the curb: a dented orange, a toy auto without wheels, an inexplicable puddle, and his abandoned handkerchief (perhaps the nickel).

He had known, and then retreat had been still open, that he should not have come: *A*. The neighborhood—behind the sober drabness of these streets one sensed an ulterior hysteria, as if some doctrinaire insistence, dreamed in walk-up third floor flats, compelled them toward illicit metaphors of bohemia and retreat. *B*. It was hot,

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hot. *C.* Those girls must be, or they would not have asked him, fools. *D.* He had forgotten his own Article. But now under his shame and elation, he shuddered, trapped; he, for whom everything must be *said,* had come upon a story ("And in the end, the nickel lay in the gutter and I could not have found it in the dark."), and he would have to go up to the girls, waiting though not for this, and confess. He hoped they would be, at least, amused.

Laying on hands, he cured his brief lameness, walked quickly to the address he had jotted on a scrap of paper and oddly not lost. Only the expected ignominy of submitting to the absurd myth of himself that three strangers might hold, bore him up through the ambush of heat (it had waited all day for his coming), the dense expectancy of the dark passage of the stairs. Furtive lights emphasized the dark at each of the four landings, and in their glimmer the ruined pattern of the wall paper eluded him like the meaning of his venture.

What rank odor in the variety of that stagnant shaft reminded him, he could not quite tell, but some smell brought back to him with unforeseen vividness the beginning of his Article, the piece whose uncertain thesis had prompted the awkward letter which had compelled his coming:

> The ultimate alienation: between the self and the face. From God we are cut off by an accident of existence: we are, He is not.

How he had pondered whether to capitalize that pronoun, and how few would relish his decision on the proper convolution.

> Our neighbors elude us by discontinuity of substance. But our faces, whose existence a toothache or tic confirms, continuous with our knowledge of them, are utter strangers. Lies. The gross jowl, the split lip, the mal-occluded teeth. . . .

He touched the teeth in his pocket, and with the first premonitory glimmer of the jest, memory of those words died from him. It did not matter; the Article had seemed once a superior sort of a joke, but it was hard now to recall his exact relation to the ideas. He remembered that he had got thirty-five dollars for it from the charming

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and foolish lady (rich and no poet) who had started *The Mask,* another Little Magazine, a better hobby, he thought, than psychoanalysis, or—but those were, he discovered, the only two indulgences of wealthy females he could, in the heat, call up.

The first issue had presented a mildly related series of essays on the theme of the title: "God as Mask," "The City as Mask," etc. He had wanted to do "The Mask as Mask," but even drunk, the charming lady had demurred. He had settled for "The Face as Mask," reserving its irony for private consumption, relishing as always the misrepresentation of himself. For he knew that in the end no face lied; even his own brooding rat's profile, his dim eyes were meanings he could not deny.

But it was into this Article that the three girls had read the evidence of spiritual kinship that had prompted their letter. Warren would not permit himself to remember precisely any of its phrases, but he felt again in his flesh the stilted desperation of its appeal, the cry of imagined recognition, and "Desolation!" he said aloud on the last step.

"What? What?" the voice cried from below, and Warren realised that through his meditation it had been shouting (bored, impatient, always delicately nasal), "Who's there? Who's there I say! Who's there?" He had rung a first-floor bell for the answering buzzer that released the hall door, not wishing to advise the girls of his coming. He preserved the fiction of choice, would not admit he had dissipated all possibilities of retreat. "Is there anybody there?" the voice tried again, and Warren crouched back against one wall, panting, enjoying for a moment the play of concealment and flight. "What the hell," it said wearily, "kids!" and a door slammed.

He was at their door now, and he bent to read their forgotten names in the faint light leaking through where the door had warped from the frame. Hilda Reznick (that was it; he had written on a postcard, not quite sure why, "Dear Hilda, I shall be there. W."); Rose Banf or was it Bamp, some truncated un-name not decipherable in the near darkness; Bea Goodside; and he bowed even further forward to listen for a little. In the moment of eavesdropping, crouched and intent, he seemed at prayer.

"Ub-bub soon?" someone said.

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And "How about the drinks?" someone else.

And the first again, "Ub-bub-buh." They were too far from the door, and were speaking quietly in the first hush of the evening. It had hardly been worth listening.

As he rose, disgusted, his fingers went again to his pocket, rediscovering the teeth; and without time for decision he fitted them into his mouth, the gross incisors, secure on wires, lapping over his lip. It was as if he submitted to, rather than assumed, the disguise. The angle of protrusion, the size of the teeth were outrageous to a point just short of advertising their falsity, and his upper lip curled back from their marginal horror in a grimace of self-contempt.

He had bought them once in one of those Fun Shops, where among small boys coveting sneezing powder, exploding cigars, and stink bombs, he used to go to refresh his metaphors of malice and weakness. The teeth ("How to greet your Mother-in-law," the box had suggested above a detached, toothy grin) had seemed to him a revelation, a completion of himself that his flesh had not achieved, nor his imagination foreseen. He touched almost guiltily his half-finished mouth, and then, with feigned indifference, the teeth. These would be the point of his inconclusive ugliness: the stubborn pallor, the mouse-colored nap of hair, the faded lips redeemed from the nondescript. Craftily, he piled them with a pack of magic cards, a three-ring puzzle.

"And these?"

"Four bits, mister."

"O.K. Don't bother to wrap them." And as a final gesture he had pretended to forget the teeth, lingering outside the shop so that the storekeeper had had no trouble catching him.

He pressed the bell and, too quickly (they must have heard his scuffling), a dark, drastically corseted girl opened the door to his show of teeth.

"Oh," she said in soft amazement; and, gauchely dissembling her start, "I'm Hilda."

The other two girls had edged up close behind her, and sick at heart before their assembled ugliness, he stopped at the doorway, unwilling to commit himself to their acceptance. "It is a mistake, a mistake," he thought. They would never understand the equivocal

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mockery of his disguise; before their homeliness, uncomposed and self-conscious, the teeth were simply—an insult. He had a vague sense of repetition, his day proposing its meaning in alternative symbols.

When he had moved, after all, a little forward into the room, the three girls stirred uneasily, rearranging themselves like bric-a-brac that would simply not fit, but could not, for the sake of some unknown obligation, be cast off. They had waited all day, prepared to flinch at the inevitable offense of his glance; but they had claimed, half-incredulously as at the granting of a prayer not even confessed, his teeth as a warrant of acceptance. He knew that Hilda's first "Oh!" must have been a timid cry of hope, not the baffled shock of others on whom he had tried this same absurd disguise.

"No," he cried silently, irked that he would not be able to make the final gesture of removal. He trembled at the monstrous possibilities of offense, but, "I shall wear them to the end," he decided; and warm with the appreciation of his own subtle generosity, "They shall never know."

Embarrassed at his long silence, Bea said, "You didn't ring." She looked at him up to the moment of speech, and then, with the air of avoiding a consummation, down at her stumpy legs.

"The door downstairs was open," Warren explained, and with his first lie he felt established, at home.

"Mr. Pease," Hilda began, "won't you—"

"Please," he said, "that was only a pen-name, a joke. Warren Pease. Tolstoy, get it? I make, I am afraid, jokes."

He looked so melancholy as he said "joke" that they did not even dare to laugh at their own obtuseness. Bea, who had begun to titter, pretended she had been all along only clearing her throat, and ended in confusion, looking down at the fold of flesh that hung like a jowl where her ankle met the counter of her shoe.

"It's poor—a poor pun," he went on, "and that you see, is the real point. To make simply such an—an affront, would be boorish. But to *know* it is boorish, and on the convolution of knowing it, make it—that—"

He stopped to smile; with those teeth it was a gesture open and confiding as exposing a shameful sore. "And besides, my name is really—Plotkin!"

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This time his moue of comic disdain permitted their laughter, and assured, they reached toward him with a tentative and unaccustomed tenderness. Even Bea, who had stood against him with an air of baffled aggression, as if before a male she were cheated of her proper role, wrinkled her boneless nose at him in a grimace that might have meant welcome. "Sit down, Mr. Plotkin."

"Not Mr. Plotkin—Warren, please!" He sat down (as if waiting this signal, the girls arranged themselves about him) in the single large chair, and taking a huge ornamental flask from an inside pocket, began to drink. "Scotch," he said after a long swig, perspiring freely. "Would you care for some?"

"We have gin or rum," Hilda said, moving her chair closer to Warren's, indicating to the others perhaps that she would now take the lead. "We thought on such a day something cool—" Her "th's" rang against her teeth with a shower of spit, giving her an aspect of clumsy eagerness he found somehow touching.

"I dislike gin and rum, and especially—ice."

Though they could no longer be wary before the naked failure of his face, they did not seem able in any essential way to begin.

"You don't like ice?" Bea asked.

"I don't like ice." He would give them no opening until their meaning had grown for him clearer. He invited silence in the familiar room whose books and pictures betrayed to his quick glance only the clichés of choice; the prints of Rouault and Chagall, the volumes of Kafka and Dostoevsky, the files of little reviews charted the intellectual fashions of their world, not them. He felt ashamed before that astonishing joy and despair become—a uniform.

But the anonymity of the room, its pat evasions of loneliness, had been disrupted by his coming. It had now the raw, bruised look of habitual untidiness too thoroughly and quickly ordered. He knew he was inadequate to the apparent weight of his expected coming; only some subtle and stupendous insult could right the balance—

"That flask looks like 1920," Hilda said, insisting on her nearness.

"Those were my happiest days; I was young then." His face revealed that he could scarcely have been born then; this he knew—and again silence.

All day they must have cleaned and scurried, prepared. Even

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the positions they had taken up must have been argued, arranged: Bea and Rose on the studio couch facing him, Hilda next to him on the chair that was too small for her, the place of honor. She was bent forward, elbows on her knees, and in the vee of her slack breasts he could see a heavy fuzz of colorless hair; she must, in a gesture of hopeless vanity, have peroxided it. Catching his eye, she blushed and sat up, and he blushed with her (it was one of his few natural talents), tapping casually his protruding teeth. Whatever gambit they had prepared was lost in hesitation and visible sweat.

"Hasn't it been *hot!*" Rose whined, pushing at her limp hair, and Bea nudged her with one buttock, glaring: to talk like some debutante of the weather! There was a husband-wife ferocity in the rebuke, and he knew then that they must be finding in each other counterfeits of love. "Excuse me." Rose got up hastily, obviously in need of a place to cry, "I'll get our drinks."

"Your article," Hilda plunged in desperately. "It was that—but we already wrote—we see so few people really, but we *knew*—"

He could no longer resist the appeal of her gracelessness; without small talk, or manners (he knew their mean history; they had sat six or seven at a time before the Dean of their Municipal Girls' College to learn "poise," and scorning even the hope had grown hoarse and emphatic on soapboxes for causes in which they no longer believed), or charm, they could not compel love or remit boredom.

"No! No!" he said, "Not now. Let me tell you first what happened to me walking over from the bus. There was a paralytic, a grotesque animal, a beggar—an affront (the word suggested itself to him whenever he paused) to normality—" They listened, puzzled, eager, ready if he gave them an opening, for gratitude. There was a sense of having begun. Rose, her face clean and swollen, stood in the doorway with a tray, not daring to set it down lest she interrupt his flow of narrative; her trembling hand sloshed the rickeys over the rims of the tall glasses.

"And when he began to limp, with an offensive hobble, down the street, I followed—imitating him." (He had not meant to lie; deeper exigencies than truth compelled him.) "He hobbled, I hobbled. He whined, I whined. He stopped, I stopped."

Rose was appealing over his shoulder for forgiveness, but Bea

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stolidly avoided her eye; only Hilda listened without reserve, leaning, leaning toward commitment out of her wariness.

"But he was a comedian, that boy. Finally, he turned toward me, unable to escape, too weak to strike me down, and reaching into a greasy pocket, took out a nickel. 'Here, bub,' he said, "you need this more than me.' "

"And what did you do?" Hilda asked, watching his eyes, avoiding tenderly the grotesque appeal of his teeth.

"I am a philosopher," Warren said, his story obviously over. "I took it."

"Why," said Hilda, slowly, "you've been lying—that's a lie—" Warren smiled modestly, nodding her on. "—a joke—a parable—"

"A myth," Warren whispered to himself. It was scarcely audible, but Hilda, her attention unwavering, picked it up.

"A myth," she said, "and the meaning I know. I *know,* but to say it, I can't say it."

"Is it absolutely necessary, Rose, to spill *all* the drinks before we get them?" Bea rose to take the tray, and Hilda disconcerted by the diversion, glanced at her in contempt, but briefly, as if unwilling to leave for more than a moment her scanning of Warren's face.

"For every beggar, there is a more absolute beggar," he suggested. "The Chinese have a saying: below below there is below. And for every indignity there is that beside which it is dignity. Only chosen deformity, deformity *willed,* what is called stupidly 'false,' is ultimate." He spoke with no intention of being understood, mumbling and looking out the window at the first stars, but he could not discourage the vast uncomprehending attention of Hilda. She paused to show respect for what he had said, and turned to her own concern.

"Your article—it was not only the beauty of the sentences, the words. But we knew when we read it, that you *understood.* The spirit trapped in gross flesh," she indicated her own lumpy body with a despairing wave of the hand, "the *suffering;* and for the heart there is only this obscene apparatus, no instrument, no way of saying what it must, of being what it *is.* No way except, perhaps—love." Her voice had grown lower, less sure with each phrase, and the last word was lost completely.

"Except perhaps—what?" he cried impatiently. "Talk up!"

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"Love!" she said more distinctly, "Love!" She bent farther forward, her head down, until he could see once more the fur between her breasts, dewed now with sweat, heaving with her audible breath.

He felt bludgeoned by her clumsy tenderness. She made no gesture (she knew none) of approach, but the baffled innocent hunger of her eyes oppressed him. She demanded modestly the merest token of regard, but in return unleashed the great shapeless assault of, she had named it rashly, her love.

Better, he thought, for her to have endured the meager lustless embraces of Bea and Rose (she looked up at them now in muted triumph, as if to say: You see, there is also *this*) than to have exposed herself to the certainty of his insult. He grew furious with her for shaming them both, for the openness that compelled his revulsion, for the foreseeable end of their encounter.

Trembling, he wiped his brow, neck, the backs of his hands with his second handkerchief and flung it through the open window beside which he had been sitting. Hilda arose and looked down the dark shaft into which his handkerchief had fallen. From there sparse music came suddenly into the room, mid-phrase, as someone below turned on a radio.

"Heat!" he cried in disgust. "Everything else is a lie."

Rose looked up at the word, turning vaguely from him to Bea, to see if his cry had redeemed her earlier remark. She fumbled once more at her lank hair.

"I must go," he said unexpectedly, tapping his watch. "It's nearly nine."

"But that's early!" Hilda cried.

"Another appointment—"

"The refreshments—all those—we worked so—" Rose whined.

"Oh *sh!* You fool!" Hilda hissed, and to Warren, "But we haven't—"

"We never shall," he answered. "Another appointment, another face." And with no sense of willing it, he turned from them, plucked at his mouth and wheeled back toward their surprise his face without the expected teeth, scarcely known.

In the few seconds that remained and after the grotesque hyperbole of his disguise, they must have believed him really hand-

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some, secure, an utter cheat, assuming in jest what they were irredeemably and forever. He did not cry out as he might have: "*That* was the truth; what you think you see now lies," and how were they to know? Saying merely, "Goodnight," he was through the door before they could, from their sick awareness of betrayal, move or make answer.

He stamped noisily down the first flight of stairs, and tiptoed swiftly back to listen for the last time at the door. They must have stood as he had left them, clustered about the point from which he had departed, for he could hear them clearly.

"Buffoon!" Bea cried, "I knew immediately—"

And Rose, "Men—they're all the—"

But "Oh," Hilda sobbed, "Oh, it was impossible. The very walls rejected him! Oh Rose, dear Bea!" They fell together weeping and repeating to each other the happy phrase, "The very walls rejected him!"

On that he moved away, softly, softly, nursing the sense of triumph that dogs or children, an unseen laugher in the night, would dissipate, feeling down the dark well of the stairs his talisman, the teeth. Later he would dream, in the half-sleep of heat, that when he had tugged at the teeth, they would not come away.

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BERLIN LETTER

Dear Editors: In these vast and still unbelievable ruins the Germans perform their nominal human obligations, and that is about all. Life here since the end of the war has been scarcely more than a formal gesture of historic survival. There has been, of course, some resumption of normal modern routines—trade, traffic, politics, city life. Yet no society exists, and I am not being melodramatic when I suggest that these are tribal days again in German history. There is neither state nor culture, only a ruined, poverty-stricken, brutalized people, with little to eat, everything to fear, nothing to hope for. The war destroyed the traumatic Third Reich, and with it several centuries of physical achievement. The peace has managed to convert the Germans into domesticated animals: they do as they are told, and the years go by.

To write, then, of intellectual life in Germany is something of an anachronism. I would rather send you a huge chunk of stone, cut out of the Berlin rubble, with its Klee-like chalk scrawlings—"the Schmidt family is not dead, but has moved into the cellar across the street (1945)"; "Danger, still collapsing (1946)"; "Hans loves Hilda (1947)." It might be more instructive than a dozen literary letters. But there is, to be sure, an intelligentsia—in the universities, in the arts, and in *Kulturpolitik*. But intellectual life presupposes some kind of community of the spirit, with its associations of friends, privileges of contemplative leisure, and freedom of the word. None of these exist. They are either not permissible or not possible. The whole cultural world here has been hopelessly atomized. Scholars have been cut off from each other and from the apparatus of learning. Writers and artists are without the physical and spiritual independence failing which there is neither craft nor integrity. For example, there is as yet no general study of Nazism written by a German, and I don't know of any author who is even thinking of the project! Libraries have been destroyed or removed; most of the documents are unavailable in Allied hands; with the existing restrictions on travel it is quite impossible to collect historical data. This means

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that so far as both the masses and the intellectuals are concerned little more is known in Germany today about the structure of fascism and the general character of a totalitarian regime than was known when Hitler was alive. Out of the whole show in Nuremberg there emerged only sloppy publicity releases, duly reprinted in the controlled German press (and only recently, one good solid book, a study by Eugen Kogon, *Der SS.Staat*). For the rest, there is only inconsequential journalism and superficial, confused comment. Works like those of Konrad Heiden, Franz Neumann, etc., have yet to be reprinted or imported into Germany. I should say—the great gospel of Denazification and Democratization notwithstanding—the Allied powers prefer to perpetuate the political stupor of the Germans, rather than to shake them into self-consciousness and into a genuine awareness of what is happening in the world. As a matter of fact, one would be hard-pressed to find anywhere in the post-war German literature an account of or a comment on the personality of Adolf Hitler! The subject is simply not touched, as if the corpse itself had some animistic power of reprisal, as if a deep amnesia had struck the German mind.

These dark-age shadows over Germany's intellectual life are real and literal, not metaphorical. The books which are published are released in pitifully small editions and scarcely available outside the city of publication. When the philosophical works of Karl Jaspers are reissued they are simply not to be had unless one makes a pilgrimage to Heidelberg or Munich. Book-reviews and literary criticism are almost unknown; few newspapers take notice of books, and the monthly journals probably never even receive them in the present chaotic zonal conditions. I have heard of an interesting new novel published by Werner Krauss in Frankfurt, a bitter Kafkaesque account of life in a Nazi prison, and with luck I may be able to comment on it sometime next year. The situation is impossible, but for now unalterable.

Part of all this is due to physical factors issuing out of the post-Nazi breakdown—the shortage of paper, the destruction of printing machines, the transportation crisis. But just as much responsibility can be laid at the door of the British and American authorities. The large official policy is deadening enough; combined with the pettiness and provincialism of the bureaucrats themselves it exercises a paralyzing influence on what little native talent and inspiration there is. In the beginning I remember there were some signs of a renaissance. Men like Jolas were about, helping to introduce T. S. Eliot to German writers and poets, to reintroduce Joyce, and bring new (and very ignorant)

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generations into contact with modern literature and ideas. The renaissance was short-lived. Dolf Sternberger's *Wandlung* printed some lines from *Four Quartets;* and then the reinforcements came up from the rear with the manuscripts of *Three Men on a Horse* and *The Voice of the Turtle,* the latest films of Deanna Durbin and Mickey Rooney, books of instruction on how to play baseball, everything but a selection of current American comic-strips. (Curiously and happily enough no such thing exists in Germany; not a single newspaper here carries a comic-strip!)

The result has been disastrous. The German intelligentsia has learned nothing, read nothing, since 1933, and it has forgotten much. Freud and Marx are only lingering memories, and to the younger generation mere calumnied names. Of Joyce, Eliot, Gide, Kafka, Silone, little is known, and they are rarely discussed. In art there is not only ignorance but also indifference and hostility. Paris has sent into Germany an exhibition of modern French masters, and I caught the show in Munich. It was advertised as "Extremist Art," which still had a tone from the old epoch of *entartete Kunst*. But degenerate only (forgive me for using that ugly Nazi word) were the reactions and impressions of the public. Good-willed exhibitors, dealers, critics, were scandalized and depressed. As Erich Kaestner said bitterly, "The most intolerant, stupid, and vile remarks originate almost without exception with students and other young people. Youth who were always the first and most enthusiastic partisans of the artistic vanguard today fill the ranks of the Philistines. We Germans have the aesthetic ideals of old women, and honor only trash and incompetence. . . . Art is once again free, but the students still spit on everything they do not understand just as they were taught." At some exhibitions there were incidents of mutilated canvases. And when the professionals (students and gallery-goers) were actually questioned, most of the great names meant nothing to them—Kandinsky, Grosz, Gropius, Feininger. With Picasso there was some familiarity, but not enough to offer any intelligent comment or comparison with the new works of Germans (like Franz Marc).

The very mention of these names reminds one how different the old post-war epoch was. What energy, what activity there was! In art with these masters (who are now all dead or living in other countries)—in the cinema with *Caligari* and the films of Pabst and von Stroheim, Lang, and Murnau—in poetry, in literature, in political theory. But the whole past lies today in ruins. The conquerors have no interest in saving any of the pieces, in helping to put together some stones for a new

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foundation, and the Germans themselves have neither the equipment nor the strength. Never in modern history, I think, has a nation and a people revealed itself to be so exhausted, so bereft of inspiration and even talent. In art there is almost nothing interesting (if you exclude Americans shopping on the blackmarket for masters), not even old Carl Hofer repainting his old canvases which were burned during the air-raids. In the theater the Germans play Schiller, Goethe and Shakespeare, Giraudoux, Wilder, and Simonov; but in more than two years not a single substantial work of a German playwright. In 1945 there was some notion current that with the fall of Goebbels and his *Reichskulturkammer* there would be a flowering of so-called *Schublade* literature; but the drawers were bare, they held no hidden manuscripts. In the film there are no movies worth seeing, because there are no scenarios worth doing and no directors worth watching. Most of the efforts are devoted to making passable Hollywood-type products with primitive technical equipment, plus a Message—unbelievably boring *tendenz* in behalf of the police against the evils of black markets, and similar decent upright propaganda for the new respectable Germany.

In the end the Germans will have to help themselves: they will neither have a revolution made for them, in politics, nor a course in re-education imported for them to revive their art and literature. They do speak a great deal about *Kulturelle Erneuerung:* and the amount of religious devotion which is being given over to the ideal of *Kultur* almost makes up for the bad time when the word was unpronounceable because the SS man reached for his revolver. But most of all this consists of vague clichés and the pathetic attempt to restore some measure of self-respect and national pride in the dim limelight of past glories. It is perhaps the most repeated theme in German intellectual life today, but it is still a theme without ferment, for it is not a genuine quest for traditions, for the compulsions of the inner life. It is less concerned with new and vital creative activity than with the passive appreciation of the art of a happier era. Historians insist on the heroic substitution of Stein and Humboldt for Frederick the Great and Bismarck; Lessing, Goethe, and Kant are subject to constant invocation; a cult of Heine and Mendelssohn is growing. There is a vulgarity to this kind of usable past, which is nothing more than the cheap conscription of fashionable heroes; and even at its best it is sweetly absurd. In his book, *Die Deutsche Katastrophe,* the dean of German historians, Friedrich Meinecke writes—"In each German city and community I would like to see the foundation of a society of cultural friends which I would prefer to call the Goethe

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Society. . . . The Goethe societies would have the mission of penetrating the hearts of listeners with well-modulated recitals of Germany's noblest music and poetry . . . perhaps every week, on a late Saturday afternoon, wherever possible in church. . . . Poetry and literature are to constitute the inner center of such ceremonial hours. . . . " This is nothing less than planned, institutionalized *Innerlichkeit*.

One only wants to say to all this, with Goethe (the Goethe Society permitting), "Oh, this wretched nation, it will not end well, for it will not understand itself!" Meinecke himself offers in his book a hopeless jumble of an analysis. He sees Nazism as a synthesis of the two great dynamics of the nineteenth century, namely nationalism and socialism, and the synthesis was only wrecked by Hitler's lack of moderation. Hitler apparently lacked that harmony of "might and mind" which were Bismarck's greatest virtues. He yearns for a new "spiritual upsurge" and recalls the splendid August days of 1914; there seems to be a note of sadness to his confession that Germany is a "burnt-out crater of great power-politics." But perhaps we had better leave Meinecke in his church on late Saturday Afternoon singing *Lieder*: the professor is a very old man. The younger men, for the most part, make a more decisive break with the imperial tradition of the German past and the theory of national-socialism. But their faults, on an intellectual level, are even worse. There is, as you can well imagine, no end to shoddy Spenglerianism. One "analysis of German destiny" suggests that Germany owes its downfall not so much to "the political immaturity of the German people as to their biological overripeness." The author sees society growing and decaying with the seasonality of vegetables: and he concludes, "it has often happened that *one* man, luminous with the light of a shining idea, showed dull-minded humanity the way. We should learn to pray for his coming. . . ." That church of Meinecke's might, at that, do a flourishing business! But then where would we put one German who has cried for "another great Jew" now that Jesus, Marx, Freud are gone? The few on the outside scarcely seem to be setting up a better camp. "Whether God is a heavenly being, vested with total power," writes young Borelius (a former soldier who now finds that the Bible constitutes as great a metaphysical threat to the free soul as *Mein Kampf*), "whether he walks the earth and is called Hitler—the difference is ridiculously small. The principle of the godlike quality, the irrational principle, remains the same." There is, in addition to all of this, a good deal of Nietzscheanism, a substantial amount of Kantianism, some Marxified Christianity, but I won't bore you with samples of these effusions. They are all very de-

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pressing. The single constructive work done by younger men is the recent *Diktat der Menschenverachtung,* an historical documentation of SS murder-medicine by several Heidelberg doctors, and a humane and bitter book.

Of the writers with reputation who remained in Germany in the so-called "inner emigration" and did not compromise themselves too seriously with the Third Reich—Thomas Mann suggested a dozen names for readmission to the P.E.N.—very few appear to be active in cultural life. Erich Kaestner has busied himself with literary journalism in Munich. Ernst Wiechert, who spent some time in Buchenwald, has written two novels, well-intentioned but dull things and interesting only because of their sentimental mysticism. Ernst Glaeser has reissued his thin anti-Nazi novel of1936, *Der Letzte Zivilist* (written in Switzerland), but has made no attempt to square his career with the vicious Wehrmacht newspaper which he edited during the war years. Erik Reger is the leading editor of the Berlin *Tagesspiegel,* and is possibly the only publicist in Germany who is capable of style and insight; his newspaper is really one of the finest in Europe (add the *Times* and *Guardian* in England, *Combat* in Paris, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in Switzerland) and one of the most courageous (he and his paper would be liquidated the very first night the Russians retook control of Berlin). Karl Jaspers in Heidelberg has written several little tracts for the times, good liberal propaganda in behalf of democracy and against Nazism; but there will only be something substantial to discuss when he completes his ambitious three-volume philosophical work, *Von der Wahrheit.* For the time being he has come into a certain notoriety on the other side of the Rhine as one of the existentialist fathers; disciples of Sartre have translated his books into French and have even published a full-length biography.

The two most celebrated names on the German scene remain Martin Heidegger and Ernst Juenger. Both live in seclusion, Heidegger in Freiburg, Juenger near Hanover, and both are on the Allied blacklist. Both have their desks high with manuscripts, none of which will find its way to publication until the total ban on their works is removed. And both men have been elsewhere widely reprinted and honored, especially in France and Switzerland, during this period of their German disgrace. Heidegger was a Nazi party member and in 1933 assisted in the cultural purge, even to the elimination of his old philosophical colleague Husserl, who was a Jew. By 1935, a tired, disillusioned Heidegger had withdrawn from politics. He published almost nothing aside from slight literary essays. During the war, according to his students, he definitely stood in

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opposition to the regime. The French authorities were, to be sure, prepared to forgive and forget, a policy of compromise which has stood them in good stead in organizing a brilliant cultural program in their areas of Germany. But there was, first, strong opposition from Communists in France, for whom Heidegger is another German to be beaten, and also a fine example of "decadent reactionary mysticism" which should remain on the index under any circumstances. And there was, too, the influence of the Catholic Church both in France and Germany; the man who had denied God had better be left alone and powerless in his Black Forest ski-hut. Today Heidegger remains *verboten,* and with him his new manuscripts, including a second volume of his famous *Sein und Zeit,* a work on Nietzsche and nihilism, a study of Greek philosophy, papers on logos and ontology, and a dozen other things.

The case of Juenger is somewhat different. Although he was never in the party, his ideological collaboration with the fascist movement was for a great many years substantial and intimate. He was the philosopher of national-chauvinism, the poet of militarism. In the mid-twenties Hitler often thanked him for the "fanatical clarity" of his pen. Works like *Feuer und Blut* typified his worship of purifying violence and his mysticism of war. Typical sentences: *"Wir können gar nicht national, ja nationalistisch genug sein." "Jeder anders Fühlende muss mit dem Brandmal des Ketzers behaftet und ausgerottet werden."* But then a curious thing happened during the Third Reich. Ernst Juenger, noble soldier of the revolution, apparently, to all intents and purposes, deserted the cause. I doubt whether at that time, and perhaps even today, a real change of spiritual values took place. I think it was essentially the psychic recognition that the dangerous life could only be had now in defiance of the law. Juenger's novel, of 1939, *Auf den Marmorklippen,* an account of the destruction of civilization by a barbaric Oberförster, was a veiled but unmistakeable anti-Nazi creation. His mid-war pamphlet, *Der Friede,* which he wrote secretly in Paris and which has only had a clandestine circulation, was an attempt to formulate independent non-Hitlerian war aims. He seemed to find scope for his "adventurous heart" with the anti-Hitler opposition; it was not unimportant that in Paris he learned to admire André Malraux above all other French intellectuals. In the summer of 1944, when the famous 20 July putsch occurred, J. broke with General Stuelpnagel in whose Hotel Majestic headquarters he was a staff-officer: the General, a fellow conspirator, could not see his way through to the wholesale assassination of the SS which Juenger had suggested—Juenger whose writings

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had schooled several generations of fanatical fascist youth! Later that year his son was killed in action on Italian *Marmorklippen,* and this too has worked on Juenger's mystical mind. It is difficult to state today where J. stands spiritually or intellectually. He, too, has been busily working; and has prepared a volume from his diaries, a new study on language, and is revising his earlier sociology of *Der Arbeiter.* At any rate Juenger seems to stand today as "a good European." How much is pose? And how much is grounded on inner conviction and ideas? I have the impression that most of the chauvinism and fanaticism is gone from his national feeling. But he is still obsessed by the imagery of violence (he recently read Melville's "Benito Cereno" and thought "the whole of our history is there!") and the mystique of war has remained, although with a new twist. The essence of the *Fronterlebnis,* he wrote in his mid-war pan-European pamphlet, is the secret respect and mutual love which grows among all soldiers. This new front-ethos should be the guaranty of the good peace. War was the great common achievement of mankind, and it can logically only be followed by the common achievement of a great peace. Theoretically, this was non-Hitlerian; heresy from the doctrine of German supremacy in a European slave order; shameless appeasement of the enemy. Practically, it was ridiculous—think, if you please, of the fraternization betwen the maquis and the SS, the partisans and the Gestapo, the GI and the Wehrmacht *Landser!* But for Juenger it was a private bridge of transition—from hate to love, from adventure and danger to peace and quiet, from Germany to Europe, from the Movement to the Church. The Vatican, indeed, has been supporting the clandestine circulation of the pamphlet, and the Catholic international may yet rescue him from the shadows of his political excommunication.

The picture I have sketched of the German literary scene is unpleasant and unattractive, but the grimmest details have yet to be added. The era of Goebbels and his *Reichskulturkammer* is gone, the old enslavement of art and culture has passed away. But the writer in Germany is not a free man, nor has cultural life been liberated from the vestigial forms of totalitarian control which here as elsewhere in Europe are viciously eating away at the independence of the spirit. That there is not yet full freedom in Germany is explained away as a tactical temporary necessity. But nowhere are the *principles* of cultural freedom recognized, or even given lip-service. Books and writers are forbidden, and no one bothers to inquire by what *right* (apart from the naked, stupid right of conquerors) the traditional civil liberties of publishers and authors in

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a democratic order are blandly overlooked. Juenger, for example, circulates in unauthorized editions, and when I suggested that the safest and healthiest situation would be an uncensored distribution and free, unrestricted controversy in press and journals I was answered by minds who understood only that *dangerous ideas have to be forbidden.* So it is that we will probably never have a situation here in which papers and journals are not *licensed,* where manuscripts can be freely judged and selected and not merely *permitted,* where literary and cultural ventures have not first to be *authorized,* where the writer and artist can work in ease and security without anxiety about some possible official reproach.

I don't have space to indicate how this semi-totalitarian dimness in the German picture has given Russian and German Stalinism precisely the half-light it needs to have its own way. The supreme right of the State in matters of art and culture, the partisan party standard as the measure of a writer's legality—these are the two great principles accepted both by East and West in Germany . . . the Anglo-American West out of weakness and confusion, and the bourgeois ignorance which feels the best way to combat Nazism is to hide all copies of *Mein Kampf* . . . the East, out of high Stalinist conviction. Under this cover of darkness Stalinism may yet eliminate all "decadence in culture" and "disruption in politics" from Central Europe. The campaign has been building itself up, and only recently the almost solid Communist cultural front (led by Friedrich Wolf and Johannes Becher) was reinforced by the stalwarts, Ludwig Renn and Anna Seghers. But this is spilling over into the entire German political question which I want to reserve for my next letter.

Melvin J. Lasky

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Arnold Hauser

CAN MOVIES BE "PROFOUND"?

The novel is the only major art form that has come down to us from the nineteenth century in a viable condition. No other genre was capable of expressing modern man with his complexities, contradictions, and approximations. Only the novel could do justice to the multiplicity and atomization of his mind, his unfettered spirit of experimentation, his ambivalent morality and divided emotions. The drama by comparison seemed obsolete, having lost its social function and moral significance. By the turn of the century, society had ceased to create new dramatic conflicts and the old ones were withering away. This, and not the competition of the movies, was the danger facing the theater; actually the film owed its success to the precarious situation of the theater, or, more accurately: the decline of the theater and the rise of the film can both be attributed to a new sense of solidarity with the objective world. The novel in this respect only prepared the way for the film.

The dramatic form was too narrow for the labyrinthine ways of modern psychology; within its limitations a character living in the twilight between the white and the black of stage conceptions could not be made credible. In the era of bourgeois tolerance, in which to understand was to forgive, the drama which interpreted character in terms of a single action and identified the whole man with his act, could not be the representative art form, but inevitably gave way to a genre capable of showing that the act, as often as not, is a mere mask behind which the actor hides. The drama of this period dealt with the hereditary themes either in the manner of a semi-serious, playfully ironic puppet show, or else in the style of a philosophical essay, closer to the modern intellectual novel than to traditional drama which gathered all problems into a single conflict and cut the knot

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with one bold stroke. The sense of modern reality was present only in the novel. Respect for the drama was a mere left-over from Puritan classicism, a flirtation with the poverty of a form that had been spiritually outgrown.

The novel was the representative literary form of the previous century, if only because it was the psychological genre par excellence. For, just as in the Middle Ages theology was master over all other intellectual disciplines, now psychology was becoming the central science and the epitome of all wisdom. Every significant achievement in literature and the humane sciences opened new access to the human psyche, every important work of philosophy or history constituted a new contribution to the analysis and interpretation of man. The French, English, and Russian novel, the new social sciences, modern psychology, and psychoanalysis, all strove toward an understanding of the man who had risen out of the turmoil of the industrial revolution and, in modern bourgeois society, fallen out with himself. The basic trait of the picture they revealed was inner conflict, the disintegration of the personality. The findings of historical research are perhaps best summed up in the words of Ortega y Gasset: "Man has no nature, he has only a history." And in literature, a hero's disunity and alienation actually became the touchstone of his significance. The psychology that failed to see the strange, the dangerous, the abysmal in man, that did not state at the outset: "You are not what you seem," came to be regarded as hopelessly idyllic and simplistic. To be sure, at the time of the First World War when the film art was coming into being, certain signs (such as the works of Franz Kafka, which departed from a purely psychological vision of man) pointed to a change in this attitude. Nevertheless the film was, and is increasingly, judged by the standards of psychological analysis, a type of expression for which it is not equipped, and from this inadequate standpoint it appears superficial and meaningless. A conception which can only subject the problems of metaphysics and ethics, the symbols of religion and mythology to psychological interpretation, and which, instead of creating such ideas, religions, myths, can only produce a psychology of man's struggle with them, cannot do justice to the drama or to the film, and will inevitably appraise the film in particular as intrinsically unintellectual and unprofound. The profundity

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that resides in the multiplicity and shadings of psychological analysis will fit neither into the three acts of a drama nor into the three-hundred scenes of a film. In a certain sense Thomas Mann is right in saying that the novel is more profound than the drama, and he even seems to be more or less justified in remarking elsewhere that the film has nothing in common with art. It assuredly has little in common with the art that fathoms psychological depths.

However, all art is not "profound"; there is also an art which, though lacking the dimension of depth, can boast some very great works. Raphael, Rossini, Victor Hugo—to take the most disparate examples—cannot but be regarded as great masters, but no one will claim that their works offer an insight into the depths of man's soul or destiny. The euphony, the balance, the harmonious lines of their works are pleasing without being profound, and the impression conveyed by these works is one of perfect artistry, although they exist in a world that is without mystery, fully deciphered and unveiled.

In addition to this unprofound art, there is an art whose profundity is *not* psychological, that is to say, it is not accomplished by analysis and interpretation of the individual traits of psychological being. The great tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles are profound without psychological depth, because their *form,* the form of tragedy itself is profound. Their profundity consists in the unveiling of the intelligible, free personality turned essence and in the revelation of a substantial being that is ordinarily covered over. The characters of tragedy can, in a certain sense they must, be uncomplicated, schematic, flat-surfaced; the tragedy itself is never flat, for every successful work participates in the depth of the genre.

And literature offers other forms of depth that are not psychological and do not derive from dark, mysterious characters. There can be depth in the relations between unprofound, undifferentiated, summarily sketched characters, as for example between Aunt Betsey and Mr. Dick in *David Copperfield.* The earthly paradise of these two fools is beyond a doubt one of the most beautiful and most profound daydreams in literature; the idea that in life's important moments a fool always says "the right thing," because in such moments all of us are fools, and because Betsey Trotwood knows how to find the right thing, the best thing, in the words of a fool—or perhaps

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even in the twittering of a bird—*is* profound and cannot be called anything but profound. And this picture of a world in which the words of fools and the twittering of birds have a meaning that cannot be expressed in the language of intelligence, has a depth of its own which—as the Mr. Dick scenes in the film version of *David Copperfield* amply show—is quite accessible to the film.

There are not only manifest forms of depth in art, there is also a latent form: a hint of depth, which reveals only the gap where a link in the chain is missing and there is meaning to be filled in; an intimation of the breach in the edifice and the blind spot in our own eye; an indirect representation of depth, or in other words: a circling round the mystery, an admission of our incompetence even to inquire into it (see Ernst Bloch's variations on this theme of "*docta ignorantia*" in his *Geist der Utopie* [Spirit of Utopia], 1923). Art possesses in the symbol an instrument which in spite or perhaps indeed because of its emphasis on the meaningless torso of things, conveys some sense of its participation in another world, its bond with the original mystery. And the more indirect, stammering, recalcitrant the form through which art suggests the meaning beneath and destroys the surface meaning, the closer it comes to the mystery of things. The strange, inarticulate wisdom of the witches in *Macbeth,* the Mothers in Goethe's *Faust,* Hölderlin's flags that "clatter in the wind," the ghost in Gogol's "The Overcoat," the eerie "I-piti-piti-ti-ti-ti" of the telegraph in Andrey Bolkonsky's delirious dream, are all such intrinsically meaningless messages from the depths. Or the old legend related by Tolstoy in his *Popular Tales*: Long, long ago there was a saintly hermit who lived on a desert island. One day some fishermen landed near his hut, among them an old man who was so simple-minded that he could barely talk and was unable to pray at all. Such ignorance filled the hermit with consternation, and with great trouble and pains he taught the old man the Lord's Prayer. The old man thanked him kindly and left the island with the other fishermen. Some time later, after the boat had vanished in the distance, the hermit suddenly saw a human shape on the horizon, walking on the surface of the water and approaching the island. Soon he recognized the old man, his pupil, and when the old man set foot on the island, the hermit, silent and abashed, came out to meet him. The old man stammered: "I

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have forgotten the prayer." "*You* don't have to pray," the hermit replied, and sent him away. Striding over the waters, the old man hurried after his boat.

Here depth is expressed without psychological complexity. Another such surface symbol occurs in the story of the conversion of the Indian saint, Rama Krishna. One day when he was still hardly more than a boy, he saw a flock of white cranes flying over the fields of his native village, high in the air, close to the blue heavens. He was so affected by the sight that he fell into a dead faint. When he recovered his senses, he was a changed man, awakened and converted.

Such depths are not closed to the film. The gulls and sailboats that swarm around the mutinous cruiser in *Potemkin* have no less symbolic power than the cranes in the story of Rama Krishna. As these little sailing craft, bringing gifts of bread and cigarettes to the rebels in their helpless ship, glide weightless over the wide dark waters with billowing sails, white and innocent as the sea-gulls and the woolly sheep in the sky, are they not a symbol and a promise of human brotherhood?

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THEATER CHRONICLE

PROPS AND PROPERTY

THE HEIRESS. By Ruth and Augustus Goetz. Biltmore Theater
AN INSPECTOR CALLS. By J. B. Priestley. Booth Theater
COMMAND DECISION. By William Wister Haines. Fulton Theater
THE DRUID CIRCLE. By John Van Druten. Morosco Theater

Business is bad this fall in the theater. Behind time, as usual, the entertainment industry is just now feeling the slump which began last year for the book trade and the department stores. There are fewer openings; empty rows of seats betray plays that are classified as successful; a school has been organized for the benefit of unemployed "name" actors to provide them, like patients hooking rugs in a mental institution, with some therapeutic occupation. Plays which have weathered the season display, for the most part, a certain workmanlike solidity. The well-built stage set of *The Heiress,* the safe, well-constructed plots of *Command Decision, The Druid Circle,* and *The Inspector Calls,* all reassure the playgoer against the prevailing storms; they are built to last, for an evening. As the value of houses and land, of what is called "real" property, becomes inestimable during a dangerous inflation, so the "real" property of the theater, sound plotting, plausible characterization, a balanced outlook, appears to be quoted during this crisis at an almost exaggerated premium—there is something slightly ridiculous about those open, well-padded boxes of experience into which, at the rise of a curtain, we can gain admission for a few hours in the evening. These plays are not contemptible: upon a modest segment of human life, a family, a school, an air-force unit, a temperate beam of justice plays impartially—a small truth is told. But the heavy workmanship of these structures is out of all proportion to their function; it is as though one were to make an umbrella out of solid marble. These plays are honest but not serious—decent, respectable, and humdrum, like the contents of the average man's mind. The playgoer can participate in them with a mild sense of satisfaction, but he

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hesitates to recommend them to others; the experience has been too relaxed, as it were, and domestic for public comment.

The Heiress is an adaptation of Henry James's *Washington Square*. It has a stage-set of such massive authenticity that it is almost a contribution to the housing problem, a wind blowing in freshly from the square, whipping the white curtains, fine intimacies of lighting, and one of those evening scenes, simple, melancholy, and uncorseted, at which Mr. Jed Harris, the director, excels, a scene in which the masks of the day, the postures of action and decision, are laid aside for the night and two middle-aged people, brother and sister, facing each other wearily in a dishabille of gesture, yawning, intermittently conversing, their voices slowly decelerating, acknowledge the failure of all things, the daily death of belief. The interjection of fatigue, with its nullification of "problems," has a peculiar poignancy in the theater, where action is the *sine qua non*: Brutus in his tent, Emilia combing Desdemona's hair and offering to go fetch her nightgown, Sonya and the doctor, too tired to feel, sitting glassy-eyed over the samovar toward the end of *Uncle Vanya*—such intermissions of conflict are the musical rests of the drama. There is the murmur of all those lingering good nights in Dr. Sloper's conversation with Mrs. Almond; what is unfortunate about *The Heiress* is that its sound is less real than its silences.

It would be idle to complain that the authors of *The Heiress,* Ruth and Augustus Goetz, had missed the point of James's story, if only they had missed it completely. This, however, they failed to do. The vague, large, awkward figure of Catherine Sloper is still dimly there at the center, embarrassing the playwrights as she embarrassed her father and her aunt Lavinia, who, like Mr. and Mrs. Goetz, wanted to "make" something of her. Her father wished her to be a sensible woman; her aunt wished her to be a romantic heroine; Mr. and Mrs. Goetz wish her to be a thumping Freudian case-history, a repressed libidinal impulse which, thwarted, destroys itself. But it is poor Catherine's fatality that she cannot "be" anything; a great block of recalcitrant material, she confounds all efforts to mold her. She has the stubbornness of inert matter, lacking both the power to move and the power to resist movement actively; she can be carried along, dropped, and retrieved, but nothing can really happen to her—she is too unwieldy. Dr. Sloper's failure to perceive this is the tragic error that keeps the story in motion; he has observed that he himself cannot alter her, but, neglecting to reason from experience, presumes that the fortune-hunter who courts her can actually affect her destiny. His parental firmness, based on this

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mistake, has an arbitrary and almost impious character; the reader opposes him, for the reader divines, through his instinct, that the doctor's fears, however applicable they might be in any ordinary case, are in this instance groundless—nothing can happen to Catherine. And the doctor's death, in the novel, has the irony of a pure irrelevance; he dreaded what would happen when he left her, but everything goes on as before.

Catherine, clearly, is a square, that least dynamic of all shapes, the shape that gives the book both its pattern and its title. Yet this unbudging entity can feel—this is the miracle of the novel, which has a charm truly pantheistic: the hills are skipping with Catherine, and a rock can quiver at a slight. In James, there is a delicate tenderness toward Catherine that is a courtesy extended to all inanimate objects and inarticulate creatures. The coercion attempted on Catherine by each of those interested parties, father, and suitor, and aunt, appears, in the light of this tenderness, as a cosmic want of refinement, a crass insensitiveness on man's part to life of a lower order. All plans made for Catherine must of necessity deny her nature, and the well-meaning efforts of Aunt Penniman are quite as cruel in this respect as the selfish schemes of the suitor and the father's clever maneuver. But this cruelty, too, like everything impinging on Catherine, fails to dent its object. A cry of pain, a silence, and then Nature resumes its habits. Human beings, the past, sympathy itself are defeated in the serene middle age of the heroine, which knows no grudges or regrets, but smiles placidly back on its memories like a blue and empty day.

In the problem of awareness it sets itself, the recognition of consciousness in a creature mute and inglorious, this story is, in essence, a poetic feat of personification. To "humanize" the tale in the vulgar sense, which is the task Mr. and Mrs. Goetz have undertaken, to make Catherine, that is, sympathetic by making her social presentable, teaching her how to walk and speak, like a DuBarry Success Salon neophyte, how to do her hair and respond to the advances of a lover, is to undo, with infinite labor, the work of the original author. If the playwrights are not wholly lacking in invention, a fresh start would have been more advisable, for though a passable melodrama results when the adapters have got their hand in—cruel father, abused daughter, deceitful lover, Victorian setting, crashing psychological finale which suggests a subtitle, The Spinster's Revenge—yet enough of the novel is still protruding, particularly in the first act, to throw the sequel into very flat relief. The audience which has beheld Basil Rathbone, a tired, trenchant practi-

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tioner, handing his bag to the maid and turning to face, once again, the friendly image of opaque good nature presented to him by Wendy Hiller, can only be disappointed that it sees no more of these people as the play proceeds; it wonders what can have happened to them and feels the boredom and restlessness that follow an unwanted interruption. Later in the evening, when passion is understood to have awakened her, Miss Hiller floats gracefully about the stage in arabesques of womanly feeling, and still later she burns with anger and her eyes flash terrible meanings (she has gotten to resemble her father), but all this appears a little tawdry and professional after those first few insights into the clumsy joys and lumbering sorrows of an amateur. Mr. and Mrs. Goetz, I understand, are being congratulated for their integrity in resisting a happy ending, but the temptations the devil labels for us as evil are not usually the most dangerous.

An Inspector Calls is a middle-class sermon on responsibility which uses a detective-story plot formula, like bingo in the church basement, to reach the un-spiritual man. A poor girl kills herself, and a comfortable industrialist's household is disturbed at its revels by a detective, who has been sent to affix the blame. Suspicion falls on each of five people in turn, and each is found guilty; the detective turns out to be a supernatural agent, and the curtain goes down. The symmetries of this plot are as Sunday-school strict as its message: one by one, as in a chain-reaction, the actors are called upon to look smug, to start with guilt, to feign unconcern, to bluster, to go to pieces, to admit all, and to bluster again. It is Cock Robin done as a round. The sins and omissions and cruelties are all offstage, in the past; and with the art of acting in its present state of innocence, pantomine is hardly adequate to make a guilty memory bear witness to guilt. Guilt, therefore, is revealed not by the action, not by the actors' faces, but by the police-inspector, who comes to force it out. The worm of conscience, here, is a worm indeed, and the play, for all its firm structure, has a strangely soft and spineless character. Fear of implication becomes a guide to conduct. Be careful what you say, the characters keep warning each other. Be careful what you do, Mr. J. B. Priestley, the author, admonishes them; watch your step with Labor or God will give you a parking ticket.

Many people who saw *Command Decision* imagined that here too they were witnessing a kind of moral *causerie*—on the expendability of human life in war. What they actually saw, however, was a dramatization of the *story* of expendability, which is quite a different matter. A

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tough air-force general is sending out bomber-missions, beyond range of fighter-protection, to destroy three jet-plane factories that lie in eastern Germany. This operation, vital to Allied air superiority but entailing terrific losses on three successive days, is opposed, from self-interested motives, by a journalist, a staff bigwig, and a Southern congressman, all of whom are more concerned with public opinion and personal advancement than with the prosecution of the war. The public will not stand for these losses, the general is told by his critics, and in deference to these spokesmen of the public, the general is finally deprived of his command. The operation, however, is carried through, for the staff officer who replaces the general is converted overnight to his position; once he is in the general's place, he sees with the general's eyes. This play, of course, can be construed as justifying all on-the-spot military decisions; certainly, it denies the public the right of exercising judgment in an emergency or protesting the sacrifice of life. Yet the effect of the play as a whole is not to justify all on-the-spot decisions, but only a particular one, one, in fact, which is purely fictional and which is explained by the playwright to the public in the fullest detail. There can be no doubt whatever, if war itself is accepted as moral, that the stage general created by Mr. William Wister Haines took the correct course in the stage circumstances Mr. Haines contrived for him. This, however, leaves General Patton exactly where he was.

Of the hopelessness of drawing moral inferences from any specific military action, *Command Decision* provides a striking illustration. Mr. Haines perhaps wished to whitewash some actual general, but this could only be accomplished by an actual board of inquiry. Killing men can never be good, and all that can be pleaded in its favor is that there were extenuating circumstances. There can be no analogues here, for the act, if it is to be palliated at all, must be seen in its concrete setting; theft in general is not condoned if a hungry man is pardoned for stealing a loaf of bread. Moral speculation, in fact, has no place in the military scene: one cannot say how many lives should be expendable for the sake of an *x* objective unless one knows precisely what the objective is worth, what alternative methods there are of taking it, and how much time there is. But this implies an omniscience that can be only *ex post facto*. Once one accepts the principle that any life is expendable, the principle, that is, of war, then no life has an established value, and everything is tested by results. Humanitarian considerations may be a factor in a military decision; they cannot, obviously, govern it, for war is the inhumane. Tenderness for the lives entrusted to him is a good

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quality in a commander, but only in moderation, as a deterrent to military folly. So treacherous indeed are all moral footings where the problems of war are concerned that the atomic bomb can actually be represented as a life-saver by those who wish to defend it; it shortened the war, they insist, and since no one knows precisely how long the war would have lasted without it, the argument is, on this level, irrefutable.

Plays against war can evoke moral feeling, and plays about the common soldier may also do so, but a play like *Command Decision,* which concerns itself with the higher military processes, the big strategic decisions, has moved up into a sterile room from which ethical anxiety is brusquely excluded. The word *operation* is the clue. These generals of Mr. Haines's are really surgeons, disputing operational techniques over the etherized form of an invisible patient; no one questions their *right* to make the incision, but they argue with each other as to its medical *necessity.* The two congressmen hustle in like interfering relations of the patient, and the specialists show annoyance; these laymen ought not to be allowed to wander unchallenged through the premises. Professional jealousies intrude also but these are the *scandals* of a service whose ideal is an absolute colorlessness, an instrumental efficiency. Like *Yellow Jack,* like *Men in White,* this play conveys, not feeling, not thought, but information, in the manner of a feature article. With its neat and clear plot line, its ups and downs of suspense, it holds the spectator's interest without involving his emotions, and bears the same relation to war that the temperature chart of a patient bears to his human identity and his ethical worth.

In the academic life, as in the army, personal affairs are a scandal, almost by definition—that is why there is so much gossip in college communities. That a teacher should have a wife or a mother, to say nothing of a vice or a weakness, is *unthinkable* to those who look up to him; his very bodily existence, his shaving, sleeping, going to the toilet, jeopardizes his classroom standing from moment to moment; he himself, the intimate man, is the perpetual object of his students' obscene curiosity, for it both shocks and excites them to imagine him as human. The indecencies of the academic position, the shame of being a man when one would prefer to be a pure omniscience, the cowardly attempts at good fellowship, the hatred and disparagement of students which is the professor's revenge for the daily belittlement of his image that private life imposes on him, all this is the subject of *The Druid Circle,* a play that would have been better if craftsmanship had not fashioned it

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so expertly, if it had avoided high climaxes and dramatic confrontations and remained insistently on the plane of the ordinary, where the teacher's tragi-comedy really takes place. The atrocity committed by the professor, who makes a student read aloud a very intimate love-letter, is robbed of its proper shabbiness by the hysterical emphasis Mr. Van Druten, the author, puts on it; what is horrible about the academic life is not that a teacher should do such a thing in a crisis of passion and jealousy, but that he would do it as a matter of course, without any sense of emergency, as a routine disciplinary measure. That a teacher should be a tyrant is not so terrible as that he should be a petty tyrant, yet the whole tendency of his profession is to narrow his actual opportunities while investing him with sovereign powers. Jealousy, consequently, is the pedagogue's occupational habit, jealousy of his colleagues, of his pupils, of the world, of the very authors he elucidates; to present this ever-present irritant as a kind of fit arising from sexual causes, as a folly, a momentary aberration, is to divest it of that daily meanness which is its distinguishing mark. In the professor's *descent* to persecution of the ugly little pair who are his victims lies the play's real pathos and squalor, but a false nimbus of pathos is drawn about this smug couple by the author's inveterate stagecraft, which transforms a timeless study of character into a rather belated defense of youth and its sexual rights. Here, as in *The Voice of the Turtle,* Mr. Van Druten encases a certain amount of realistic observation within a sentimental convention without appearing to notice the leak of meaning that results.

Mary McCarthy

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ART CHRONICLE

THE SITUATION AT THE MOMENT

"To ascertain the master-current in the literature of the epoch, and to distinguish this from all minor currents, is one of the critic's highest functions; in discharging it he shows how far he possesses the most indispensable quality of his office—justness of spirit." The justness of spirit that Matthew Arnold asks of the critic leads, in this rather corrupt and declining age, to an attitude which in the eyes of the age itself must seem hostile. Once distinguished, the master-current, whether in art or literature, must seem an aberration—to point out which requires a quirkiness not at all resembling justness of spirit. Detachment, which is the indispensable preliminary to justness, seems on the contrary eccentricity, and eccentricity means isolation, and isolation means despair.

To define the exact status of contemporary American art in relation to the history of art past and present demands a certain amount of mercilessness and pessimism. Without these we shall not know where we are at. There is no use in deceiving ourselves with hope. Our most effective course is to confront the situation as it is, and if it is still bad, to acknowledge the badness, trusting in the truth as the premise of any improvement, and feeling a new security because of the very fact that we have met and verified the worst.

True, the situation of culture in this country has been lamented often enough in the last twenty-five years, and the lamentations have had no more effect, seemingly, than the songs of the Sirens on the plugged ears of Ulysses' sailors. Yet these lamentations have, in spite of appearances, changed something in the American consciousness, and it is necessary to keep repeating them, and in repeating them to move ever closer to the exact truth, which is a difficult one, difficult in its exactness.

American art is today involved in the general crisis of Western art, whose historic impulses, with all they carried in the way of enlighten-

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ment and of compensation for the hygienically destructive effects of enlightenment, have ebbed away in Europe under the suction of events and a declining bourgeois order. One has the impression—but only the impression—that the immediate future of Western art, if it is to have any immediate future, depends on what is done in this country. As dark as the situation still is for us, American painting in its most advanced aspects—that is, American abstract painting—has in the last several years shown here and there a capacity for fresh content that does not seem to be matched either in France or Great Britain. Yet the general crisis does not spare us and, given the obstacles American art continues to face since the Civil War, the situation still opposes itself to the individual artist with an unfriendliness that makes art life in Paris or even London idyllic by comparison. With all our present relative advantages, much more is still required of us in the way of exertion, tenacity, and independence in order to make an important contribution. The American artist has to embrace and content himself, almost, with isolation, if he is to give the most of honesty, seriousness, and ambition to his work. Isolation is, so to speak, the natural condition of high art in America.

Yet it is precisely our more intimate and habitual acquaintance with isolation that gives us our advantage at this moment. Isolation, or rather the alienation that is its cause, is the truth—isolation, alienation, naked and revealed unto itself, is the condition under which the true reality of our age is experienced. And the experience of this true reality is indispensable to any ambitious art.

Now when it comes to the Zeitgeist, we Americans are the most advanced people on earth, if only because we are the most industrialized. The activity that goes on in Paris, the talk, the many literary and art magazines, the quick recognition, the tokens of reward, the crowded openings—all these, which once were signs of life, have now become a means of suppressing reality, a contradiction of reality, an evasion. Whistling is perhaps as real as the dark but it is not as real as the fear it dissembles. What is much more real at this moment is the shabby studio on the fifth floor of a cold-water, walk-up tenement on Hudson Street; the frantic scrabbling for money; the two or three fellow-painters who admire your work; the neurosis of alienation that makes you such a difficult person to get along with. The myth that is lived out here is not a new one; it is as old as the Latin Quarter; but I do not think it was ever lived out with so little *panache,* so few compensations, and so much reality. The alienation of Bohemia was only an

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anticipation in nineteenth-century Paris; it is in New York that it has been completely fulfilled.

I would say that most of the best painting done in this country at the moment does not reach the public eye, but remains west of Seventh Avenue, stacked against the wall. It is not a case of the unknown genius in a garret—there are very few geniuses—so much as that of the unknown art in a social pocket. After all, the easel painting is on its way out; abstract pictures rarely go with the furniture; and the canvas, even when it measures ten feet by ten, has become a kind of private journal.

The master-current in the painting of our epoch is a paradox. We know that it flows out of Cubism and Matisse and through Mondrian and Miró—but in what direction does it flow since them? In France high tradition means, for the latest generation, Matisse's color and Picasso's drawing and composition. (Some, like Jean Dubuffet, may escape the paralysis of culture via Klee and the deliberate surrender to infantile experience, but they do little to vitalize tradition; Dubuffet is a first-rate painter but he leaves nothing to the future of painting.) Here in America there is also a general recognition among the most advanced young painters that Matisse and Picasso are indispensable to a great contemporary style but, in distinction to the French, they incline to accept more of Matisse than of Picasso. In Greenwich Village the attempt is being made to create a larger-scale easel art by expanding Matisse's hot color, raised several degrees in intensity, into the bigger, more simplified compositional schemes which he himself usually reserved for blacks, grays, and blues—all this to be articulated and varied with the help of Picasso's calligraphy.

There is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would *spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality. I do not know whether there is anything in modern architecture itself that explicitly invites this tendency. But it is a fact that abstract painting shows a greater and greater reluctance for the small, frame-enclosed format. Abstract painting, being flat, needs a greater extension of surface on which to develop its ideas than does the old three-dimensional easel painting, and it seems to become trivial when confined within anything measuring less than two feet by two. Thus, while the painter's relation to his art has become more private than ever before because of a shrinking appreciation on the public's

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part, the architectural and, presumably, social location for which he destines his product has become, in inverse ratio, more public. This is the paradox, the contradiction, in the master-current of painting.

Perhaps the contradiction between the architectural destination of abstract art and the very, very private atmosphere in which it is produced will kill ambitious painting in the end. As it is, this contradiction, whose ultimate causes lie outside the autonomy of art, defines specifically the crisis in which painting now finds itself. (It is worth pointing out that the surviving old masters of our time, except for Matisse, appear to have reacted to this crisis in a conservative way. The best work of Picasso and Chagall in the last twenty years, and of Miró in the last five, has been in black and white and in reduced format; the etchings and pen-and-ink drawings of the first and the etchings and lithographs of the latter two, as a rule, surpass by far their recent oils. Their genius, if not their consciousness, recognizes the demise of the easel picture and, with only two destinations left for pictorial art—the wall area and the page—they have chosen the latter, for which they find at least precedent. They are too old by now to venture on anything so unprecedented as a genre of painting located halfway between the easel and the mural.)

The only solution to the crisis would be an increasing acceptance by the public of advanced painting, and at the same time an increasing rejection of all other kinds. "Destructiveness" towards what we now possess as American art becomes a positive and creative factor when it is coupled with a real longing for genuinely high art, a longing that will not be deceived into satisfaction with anything less than the genuine, and which is protected against such deception precisely because it goes hand in hand with the courage to reject and to continue rejecting.

Clement Greenberg

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MUSIC CHRONICLE

THE STATE OF AMERICAN MUSIC

The hereditary contradictions of classical and romantic music are the problems of contemporary music. The classicists—notably Beethoven—wrote large-scale works, dramatic narratives in which every musical episode was an integral part of the plot. To achieve this, they used the means of tonality—that is, each harmonic event was related to a central tone (the key). Thus a piece was formed upon one tone, and every melodic figure grew out of it.

This basic tonality required that compositions be written in terms of harmony. Counterpoint, the harmonically independent counterplay of two or more voices, was retired to a secondary position. Polyphony, the style of counterpoint which has been paramount in music since the twelfth century, and whose supremacy was interrupted occasionally only by such populist attempts as the Renaissance opera, came to a halt.

Polyphony had held its position up to the times of Johann Sebastian Bach. But polyphonic concepts were nearly eliminated by his sons. (Johann Christian Bach called his father *"die alte Perücke,"* the old-fashioned wig.) With the Viennese classicists—Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven—polyphony played only a minor role. But the Viennese romanticists, of whom Schubert was the first, gave it up completely.

Though the disappearance of polyphony in the music of Bach's sons resulted in an oversimplification of musical devices, classical music reached its fruition in so far as polyphonic characteristics were centralized by a unifying harmonic concept—tonality. But this very centralization ended by eliminating polyphony—whence one of the most important factors in the post-romantic crisis in music.

It is easy to see why polyphony is a higher musical art form. Melody is evolved according to its own exigencies, not by harmonic precepts. In the simultaneous occurrence of decisive musical phenomena, polyphony poses intricate problems, admits a variety of emotional responses foreign to harmonic music. It requires greater sensitivity

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on the part of the listener; it permits greater artistic selectivity on the part of the composer. Coming at the listener from a number of melodic points, polyphonic music seems to take cognizance of his diversified, complicated emotional responses, whereas harmonic music extricates only one reaction—that made to the harmonically determined melody.

Polyphony is highly concentrated music whose center of gravity falls midway in the composition. Harmonic music is suspended at a tonal center which, though not extraneous, serves as a vantage point, a frame of reference for the listener; it need not be located audibly within the music itself as long as it persists within the mind and memory of the audience.

Tonality suited the Age of Reason when man, looking outside himself to explain his existence, oversimplified; for it reduced all events to one phenomenon. Baroque polyphony, on the other hand, played upon inner diversity. Introspective in character, it gave a more profound impression of man's inner needs, of basic qualities. Nor did it admit easy solutions. Modern polyphony continues this quality. Becoming more and more complex, if also, more diffuse, it takes some cognizance of the complicated, the dimly perceived, the neurotic aspects of modern life. At the same time an inner coherence both unifies and accentuates this complexity. Harmonic music, however, has become increasingly monolithic, shifting its center farther outside itself to an intellectual program or a concrete musical image of the past.

The great qualities of polyphony could not be given up easily. There were constant polyphonic ventures by the harmonic masters despite their basic adherence to a different style: Mozart, in his *Jupiter Symphony;* Beethoven, in his last string quartets. Yet classical music is harmonic in essence, and stands and falls within the concept of tonality.

As useful as the classical tonality proved for Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, their limited technique, which related every event to one basic tone, had of necessity to decline into cliché effects in which every subsequent passage could be divined by the listener. Thus music lacked its basic artistic element, that of surprise. Romanticists like Schumann and Mendelssohn got around this by making the melody the exclusive carrier of the musical substance, endowing it with the most passionate—though often quite vulgar—characteristics. At a time when the size of the audience was growing so fast that musical understanding could not keep pace, such a simple solution is at least understandable. The romanticists gave up the dramatic narrative to embark upon simple story-telling in the manner of "and then he did this, then he did that, etc."

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A much more fruitful method was devised by Wagner, who replaced the dramatic with the descriptive narrative. By breaking up tonality into small segments he strung a work on a series of episodes, each dramatic, each dependent upon a central tone; but these episodes did not make up a unified whole. Dramatic narrative became atomized; though consisting of dramatic details or episodes, it was, as a whole, descriptive in effect; a musical composition, that is, made up of tightly knit sketches—a revue.

Thus Wagner's tonality, which also introduced a series of new central tones (chromatic tonality), split the concept of unified music wide open. Using alternately all the available twelve tones of the scale as central tones, it became harmonically vague. Yet it, too, in order to maintain continuity, depended on the supremacy of melody. Although this music is harmonically as advanced as it can ever be within any tonal framework, it does not to any extent solve the problem posed by the relinquishing of counterpoint.

The twentieth-century composer was faced by the problems of (*a*) structural unity, and of (*b*) supplying a new harmonic basis. Obviously, the first problem could not be solved by going back to simple tonality. The composer had to abandon the harmonic concept and return to the interplay of melodies, which alone could give him the basis for a tighter dramatic structure. Instead of basing his plot structure on a harmonic central tone, he had to develop melodic fragments which in their alternate and simultaneous sound furnished a basis upon which to erect a melodically multifaceted structure. But into what harmonic mold were these melodies, whose composite made up the piece, to be poured, now that both classic and chromatic tonality had been fully exploited?

With a pattern of melodic motifs established by unity of plot, the modern composer could accept the challenge of Wagner's chromatic tonality which had burst harmonic limits, and expand its use in new ways. In the melodic interplay each tone was related to the other; instead of central tones, basic melodic patterns organized the harmony—a procedure which has come to be known as atonality—and the polyphonic, simultaneous relation of individual melodies moved freely within this framework. The German and Central European composers, who suffered most under the Wagnerian trauma because they had not come upon the detour into coloristic orchestration discovered by the impressionists, Debussy and Ravel, were the first to find this solution. The final break came in Schoenberg, who took music all the way back to its essential polyphonic qualities and accepted the consequences of the

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chromaticism that had, in Wagner's hands, burst the seams of traditional music. With Schoenberg, a way to cope with the problems of establishing unity upon diversity, of combining seemingly disparate melodic movements within one contrapuntal and harmonic framework, was revealed. The melodic motif became the nucleus; being used both as linear melody and as counter melody to another melody, it centralized the once contradictory aspects of harmony and counterpoint. In its evolution within the composition—an evolution that ran through ornamentation, repetition, elaboration of ideas, splitting off parts and separately developing them—the melodic motif became the keystone of modern music.

Schoenberg's solution was, unfortunately, alien to the mass audience. The widening of the musical audience had coincided with the rise of industrialism which, in turn, coincided with the romantic movement in music. The audience received its musical education from the romanticists who practised the descriptive narrative and upheld the supremacy of the soulful melody. With no tradition of polyphonic music, the audience could grasp only the simpler surfaces.

The American composer of today can only be guided by his artistic integrity, not by any real tradition. The musical expression which suits the mass taste is the romantic cliché. At the same time modernity makes its own demands. It is no accident that many American composers began as followers of Schoenberg only to end up in romantic clichés. They could not endure the terrible isolation forced upon them.

But if the American composer surrenders to descriptive narrative and harmonic music in order to reach a public, he also knows that he must differentiate himself from Mendelssohn. He does this in several ways. He infuses his works with the clichés of folk music; American folk material is archaic enough to fit in with the revivalist tendencies of romanticism. The results are such works as Copland's *Appalachian Spring,* Virgil Thomson's *Symphony On A Hymn Tune.* Or else the composer resorts to the "moderne" by adapting mannerisms from Schoenberg, and uses patterns that—while extrinsic to his style—have an air of contemporaneity. In this manner he can be academic—which he is, partly to please his audience and partly because he is so insecure in his experience (which lacks tradition) that he clings desperately to "rules"—and modern at the same time. Or else he becomes modern by simply injecting contemporary politics into what is otherwise a piece of academicism—viz., Blitzstein. The composer merely reiterates verbal statements and

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the music slavishly follows. And, of course, in order to make the text understood clearly he must insist on melodic supremacy, the only guaranty of literal clarity.

Another regressive tendency finds its outlet in a sort of neo-classicism. Here the composer reaches back to the structural and textural elements of a style that precedes even the sources of his techniques. The forms and mannerisms of the polyphonic baroque masters are taken over wholesale, but so are the basic harmonic tenets of the romantic school. Obviously, this is merely an artificial attempt to reconcile the contradictions between harmonic and polyphonic music. The result is a grotesque incongruity in which Bach is made to sound like Mendelssohn and vice versa. It is this incongruity again which lends a work its aspect of modernity. And even this may not be enough; frequently the whole thing is seasoned with some turns taken from the Schoenberg school. (Samuel Barber's *Capricorn Concerto.*)

An escapist—also regressive—tendency finds expression in a reversion to Oriental techniques such as, in the music of John Cage, the unchanged repetition of one and the same motif in an incantational manner.

This is the state of American music. But whether characterized by folk tunes, pre-classical styles, or a flight to the East, such music has in common an incapacity or unwillingness to face the problems left by the western tradition of music. It is trapped in a romantic style, the simple tonality of which by now sounds primitive. It moves along like the story-telling of a child: its total structure is not compelling. (Elie Siegmeister claims that he wrote his *First Symphony* by just sitting down to write music and, at the end, was surprised to find he had written a whole symphony.) Most compositions have such a fragmentary character that they can be adapted from symphony to ballet, from ballet to piano suite, etc. (Copland's movie music for *Our Town* may be heard in three versions: as a movie score, as a symphonic suite, as piano pieces.)

The public finds in this music a welcome escape from the contemporary problems not only of aesthetics, but, also, of society. Neoclassicism may, as likely as not, form a background to a neo-religious movement (the association with Bach); folk symphonies are idyllic retreats to a rural life; the exotic speaks in the soothing accents of the travelogue.

A pseudo-aesthetic effect is achieved by grafting special shoots onto conventional music: such is the composer's imaginative effort. Each

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element that goes to make up a "new" work is left as it was in the past. All climatic excitement must be furnished by the audience. The listener should know what is expected of him: here, he is to imagine the Middle Ages; there, Kentucky; at that point, the social revolution. No one, indeed, who really "listens" to music can take any of this seriously, since whatever may be the appeal of this music, it is not directed toward aesthetic sensibility. The composer, of course, justifies himself by pointing to examples in other countries, in other times. Ravel's and Stravinsky's neo-classicism excuse his own; the primitivistic elements of Moussorgsky explain away the hillbilly song; the orchestral palette of Debussy gives authority to today's incantational magic. But the composer forgets that in each instance he involves the sanction of men who never tried to solve the central problems of music, men whose great skill and experience, and the fact that they lived at a time when temporary detours were more feasible, have lent their works more weight than they would otherwise have.

The only exceptions, among American composers, to this sort of practice are Rogers Sessions and Charles E. Ives. Sessions approaches the problem of modernity with a compromise. In essence he accepts the polyphonic concept of Schoenberg. But by trying to force it into the mold of chromatic Wagnerian tonality—or rather polytonality in which several tones serve as simultaneous tonal centers—he destroys much of its essence, namely, the unification of harmonic and polyphonic sound. Though his approach is more musical than programmatic, he, too, skirts the issue by granting a necessary dichotomy between harmonic and contrapuntal relations. Ives, though less skilled, is more advanced. He accepts total atonality—in many cases he preceded Schoenberg. But he has yet to escape the temptations of an easy nationalistic attitude. He infuses his atonal style with folk melodies conceived within the frame of simple tonality. The two styles clash inevitably. The simple harmonic style of the folk tune sounds out of place in his complicated polyphonic texture, and the polyphony looses its unifying value through the illogical reference to alien elements.

Still, this is the best that American music has to offer. The composer will finally have to shoulder the burden of the less popular, aesthetically more honest, style of atonal polyphony. He may, or may not, arrive at a solution. But if music is to exist as an artistic expression of modern America, atonal polyphony is really the only valid guide.

Kurt List

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MODERN EVIDENCE

Marcel Proust

FILIAL SENTIMENTS OF A PARRICIDE*

When M. van Blarenberghe the elder died several months ago, I remembered that my mother had known his wife very well. Since the death of my parents I am (in a sense which it would be irrelevant to describe here) less myself, more their son. Without giving up my own friends, I turn more readily to theirs. And the letters I write now are for the most part ones I think they would have written, ones they can write no longer, letters of congratulation or condolence to friends of theirs whom I often scarcely know. So when Mme. van Blarenberghe lost her husband, I wished to tell her of the grief my parents would have felt. I recalled that some years earlier I had occasionally dined with her son at the houses of mutual friends. To him I wrote, speaking more for my late parents than for myself. I got in reply the following beautiful letter, conspicuous for great filial love. I think that this document should be made public because of the meaning given it by the drama that followed so shortly, especially the meaning it gives to the drama. Here is the letter:

LES TIMBRIEUX, PAR JOSSELIN (MORBIHAN)
September 24, 1906

I deeply regret, dear sir, that I was unable to thank you sooner for the sympathy you showed me in my sorrow. But my grief has been so great that on the advice of doctors I have been traveling for the past four months. I am only now, and with painful effort, beginning to take up my regular life again. Surely you will forgive me.

I wish to tell you, however belatedly, that I was much moved by your remembering our old and excellent relations and profoundly touched by the sentiment that inspired you to write me and my mother in the

* This piece was first published in the February 1, 1907 number of *Le Figaro*.

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name of your parents, who left us so prematurely. I did not have the honor of knowing them well, but I remember how much my father appreciated your father and what a pleasure it was for my mother to see Mme. Proust. It was most considerate of you to send us their message from beyond the grave. I will soon return to Paris and if I succeed at all in overcoming the need for isolation which I have felt since the death of him who absorbed my every interest and inspired my every joy, I would be very happy to meet you and talk with you of the past.

Very affectionately,

H. VAN BLARENBERGHE

This letter touched me very much. I pitied one who suffered so, I pitied him, yet I envied him: he still had his mother. In consoling her he would console himself. I could not agree to his suggestion of a meeting, only because I was prevented by practical details. But above all the letter wrought a favorable change in my memory of him. The good relations to which he alluded were really of the most banal social kind. At the tables where we sometimes dined, I had scarcely had a chance to talk with him, but the great intellectual distinction of our hosts on those occasions remained for me, and still remains, a guaranty that Henri van Blarenberghe, under his rather conventional exterior—the index, perhaps, of his surroundings rather than of his real personality—hid an original and lively nature. Besides, among those strange flashes of the memory which our brain, so small and yet so vast, stores in prodigious number, if I seek those which represent Henri van Blarenberghe, the flash which always remains most vivid to me is of a face smiling in a way that was particularly fine, the lips still parted after having thrown off some witty remark. Pleasant and rather distinguished, so I "resaw" him, as one might say. Our eyes have more part than we can believe in this active exploration of the past which we call memory. If you look at someone while his mind is intent upon bringing back something from the past, restoring it to life for an instant, you will see that his eyes go suddenly blind to the surrounding objects which they reflected an instant before. "Your eyes are blank, you are somewhere else," we say; however, we see only the external signs of the phenomenon that takes place in the mind. At such a moment the most beautiful eyes in the world no longer touch us with their beauty; they are, to change the meaning of a phrase of Wells's, no more than "machines to explore time,"

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the telescopes of the invisible, which become at best measures to gauge one's advancing age. One feels indeed, when one sees the unsteady gaze of old men, the gaze worn out with endless adaptation to a time so different, often so distant from their own, blindfold itself in order to recall the past, one feels indeed that the curve of their gaze, crossing "the shadow of the days" they have lived, comes to rest several feet before them, so it seems, but in reality fifty or sixty years behind. I remember how the enchanting eyes of Princess Mathilde were transformed when they fixed themselves on images of the great men and magnificent scenes of the beginning of the century. Such images, emanating from her memories, she saw and we shall never see. At the moments when my eyes met hers, I had a sense of the supernatural; her gaze, by some feat of resurrection, firmly and mysteriously joined the present to the past.

Pleasant and rather distinguished, I said, and it is thus that, in one of the more vivid images my memory had stored of him, I resaw Henri van Blarenberghe. But after receiving this letter, I retouched the image in the depths of my memory by interpreting, in terms of a profounder sensibility, a mind less mundane, certain details of his glance and bearing which could, indeed, permit of a more sympathetic and arresting meaning than I had at first allowed. Then, recently, at the request of a friend, I asked him for information concerning an employee of the Chemins de fer de l'Est (M. van Blarenberghe was president of the Board of Directors). Because he had ignored my change of address, his reply, written on the twelfth of last January, did not reach me until the seventeenth, not fifteen days ago, less than eight days before the drama.

48, RUE DE LA BIENFAISANCE
January 12, 1907

DEAR SIR,

I have asked the Compagnie de l'Est for the whereabouts of X, but they have no record of him. Are you right about the name?—if so, the man has disappeared from the company without a trace; he must have had a very provisional and minor connection.

I am distressed at the news of your health since the sad and untimely death of your parents. If it is any consolation to you, I have suffered many physical and moral ailments in attempting to recover from the

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shock of my father's death. One must always hope. . . . I do not know what the year 1907 holds for me, but let us pray that it may bring some improvement to us both, and that in several months we shall be able to see each other.

Please accept, I beg you, my deepest sympathy.

H. VAN BLARENBERGHE

Five or six days after getting this letter, I recalled, on waking up in the morning, that I had meant to answer it. The day had brought one of those unexpected cold spells which, like high tides of the air, wash over the dykes raised between ourselves and nature by great towns, and battering our closed windows, reaching into our very rooms, make our chilly shoulders feel, through a quickening touch, the furious return of the elements. Days troubled by brusque barometric changes, by shocks even more grave. No joy, after all, in so much violence. We weep for the snow which is about to fall and, as in the lovely verse of André Rivoire, things have the air of "waiting for the snow." Scarcely does "a depression move towards the Balearics," as the newspapers say, or Jamaica begin to quake, when at the same instant in Paris the sufferers from migraine, rheumatism, asthma, no doubt the insane too, reach their crises; the nerves of so many people are united with the farthest points of the universe by bonds which the victims often wish less tight. If the influence of the stars on at least some of them shall one day be recognized (Framery, Pelletan, quoted by M. Brissaud), to whom does the poet's line apply better than to such nervous ones?—

Et de longs fils soyeux l'unissent aux étoiles.

On getting up I prepared to answer Henri van Blarenberghe. But before writing him I wanted to glance at *Figaro,* to proceed to that abominable and voluptuous act called "reading the newspapers," thanks to which all the world's misfortunes and cataclysms of the last twenty-four hours, the battles costing fifty thousand lives, the crimes, the strikes, the bankruptcies, the fires, the poisonings, the suicides, the divorces, the crude emotions of statesman and actor, transmuted for our personal consumption, make for us, who are not involved, a fine little morning treat, an exciting and tonic accompaniment to the sipping of *café au lait.* The fragile thread of *Figaro,* soon enough broken by an indolent gesture, alone divides us from all the

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world's misery. From the first sensational news of so many people's grief, news we shall soon enjoy relating to friends who have not yet read the paper, we are brought briskly back to the existence which, at the first moment of waking, we had felt it futile to recapture. And if at moments we melt into tears, it is at a phrase like this one: "An impressive silence gripped all hearts, drums sounded on the field, the troops presented arms, a tremendous cry rose up: 'Three cheers for Fallières!' " For this we weep, as we refuse to weep for misfortunes closer to our hearts. Base hypocrites who weep only for the anguish of Hércules or the travels of a President of the Republic! Nevertheless, that morning I did not enjoy reading *Figaro*. I had just skimmed with delight through the volcanic eruptions, the ministerial crises, the duels of *apaches,* and I was calmly beginning to read a column whose title, "A Drama of Madness," was peculiarly adapted to quicken my morning energies, when suddenly I saw that the victim was Mme. van Blarenberghe; that the murderer, who had presently killed himself, was her son, Henri van Blarenberghe, whose letter lay near me waiting to be answered: *"One must always hope. . . . I do not know what 1907 holds for me, but let us pray it will bring improvement,"* etc. One must always hope! I do not know what 1907 holds for me! Life had not been long in answering him. 1907 had not cast off her first month before she brought him her present: musket, revolver, and dagger, and a veil for his mind such as Athena fitted on that of Ajax so that he would slaughter the shepherds and flocks in the Greek camp without knowing what he did. "I it was who put the false images in his eyes. And he rushed upon them, striking here and there, thinking that with his own hand he killed the Atrides, hurling himself now on the sheep, now on the shepherds. I made him the prey of raging madness; I forced him into the snares. He came back, his head dripping with sweat and his hands red with blood." As long as the mad strike they know nothing; then, the fit having passed, what anguish! Tekmessa, Ajax's wife, described it: "His madness is over, his frenzy has fallen like the breath of Motos. But, having recovered his wits, he is now tormented by a new affliction; for to contemplate his own evil deeds when he alone has caused them bitterly increases his anguish. Once he knows what has happened, he cries out in lamentation, he who used to say that a man

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was ignoble to weep. He sits immobile, shrieking, plotting, no doubt, some dark design against himself." But when the madness is over for Henri van Blarenberghe, it is not butchered sheep and shepherds he has before him. The anguish does not die at once since he himself is not yet dead when he sees his murdered mother before him; since he himself is not yet dead when he hears his dying mother say to him, like Prince Andrey's wife in Tolstoy: "Henri, what have you done to me! What have you done to me!" "When they reached the landing between the first and second floors," says *Le Matin,* "the servants saw Mme. van Blarenberghe, her face distorted by terror, descend two or three steps, crying: 'Henri! Henri! what have you done!' Then the poor woman, covered with blood, threw her arms in the air and fell on her face. . . . The horrified servants went out to get help. A little later, four policemen whom one of them had found forced open the murderer's door. Besides slashing himself with a dagger, he had rippen open the whole left side of his face with a bullet. *His eye lay on the pillow.*" Here I no longer think of Ajax. In that eye "which lay on the pillow" I recognize the eye of the miserable Oedipus, torn out in the most terrible act in the history of human suffering! "Oedipus bursts in with loud cries, goes, comes, demands a sword. . . . With a dread shriek he throws himself against the double doors, pulls the boards from the hinges, rushes into the room where he sees Jocasta hanging by the cord which had strangled her. Seeing her thus, the wretch trembles with horror, looses the cord; his mother's body falls to the ground. He rips the gold brooches from Jocasta's garments, with them he tears his wide-open eyes, saying that they shall no longer see the evil he has suffered and the disaster he has caused, and, shouting curses, again he strikes his eyes, the lids open, and from his bloody eyeballs a rain, a hail of black blood flows down his cheeks. He cries that the parricide must be shown to all the Cadmeans. He wants to be driven from the land. Ah, their old felicity was a true felicity; but from this day on they shall know all the evils that have a name. Lamentations, ruin, death, disgrace." And in thinking of Henri van Blarenberghe's pain when he saw his dead mother, I think of another mad man, of Lear clasping the body of his daughter Cordelia. "Oh! she's gone forever! She's as dead as earth. No, no, no life! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat,

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Marcel Proust, a few minutes after his death. The photograph was taken by Man Ray.

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have life, and thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, never, never, never, never, never! Look on her, look, her lips, look there, look there!"

In spite of his horrible wounds, Henri van Blarenbergh did not die at once. And I cannot help finding very harsh (although perhaps necessary; can one be sure what really constituted the drama? Remember the brothers Karamazov) the act of the superintendent of police. "The unfortunate man was not dead. The superintendent took him by the shoulders and said: 'Do you hear me? Answer.' The murderer opened his one eye, blinked for an instant and fell back in a coma." To this cruel superintendent I want to speak the words used by Kent in the scene from *King Lear* which I quoted just now to stop Edgar from arousing the already fainting Lear: "Vex not his ghost: O! let him pass; he hates him that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer."

If I have insisted on repeating these great tragic names, especially those of Ajax and Oedipus, the reader should understand why, and also why I have published these letters and written this page. I wished to show in what a pure and religious atmosphere of moral beauty, bespattered but not defiled, occurred this explosion of madness and blood. I wished to open the room of crime to the air of heaven, to show that this commonplace event was exactly one of those Greek dramas, the presentation of which was almost a religious ceremony and that the poor parricide was not a criminal brute, a being outside humanity, but a noble example of humanity, a man of enlightened soul, a tender and dutiful son whom the most ineluctable fatality—let us say pathological fatality, as the world would say—has thrown, most unfortunate of mortals, into a crime and an expiation worthy of fame.

"I do not easily believe in death," says Michelet in an admirable passage. It is true that he says it of a sea nettle, whose death, so little different from its life, is scarcely notable; and one might also wonder whether Michelet's phrase may not be simply one of those "basic recipes" which great writers soon acquire, thanks to which they are sure of being able to serve up to their clientele at a moment's notice the particular feast which it demands of them. Although I believe without difficulty in the death of a sea nettle, I cannot easily

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believe in the death of a person, even in the simple eclipse, the simple decay of his reason. Our sense of the soul's continuity is very strong. What! this spirit which, a moment ago, controlled life by its views, controlled death, inspired in us so much respect, there it is, controlled by life, by death, weaker than our own spirit which, however much it may desire, can no longer bow before what has so quickly become little more than a nonentity! It is with madness as with the impairment of faculties in the old, as with death. What? The man who yesterday wrote the letter quoted above, so noble, so intelligent, this man today. . . .? And also, for the smallest details are important here, the man who was attached so wisely to the small things of life, who answered a letter so elegantly, who met an overture so correctly, who respected the opinion of others, who desired to appear to them, if not influential, at least amiable, who conducted his game on the social exchequer with such finesse and integrity! . . . I say that all this is very important, and if I have quoted the whole first part of the second letter which, to tell the truth, may seem interesting to no one but myself, it is because that practical good sense seems still more remote from what has happened than the beautiful and profound sadness of the last lines. Often, in a ravaged spirit, it is the main branches, the crown, which survive the longest, after disease has already cleared away all the lower branches. Here, the spiritual plant is intact. And just now, as I was copying these letters, I would have liked to be able to communicate the extreme delicacy, and more, the incredible preciseness of the hand which had written so clearly and neatly.

"What have you done to me! What have you done to me!" If we think of it, perhaps there is no truly loving mother who would not be able, on her last day and often long before, to reproach her son with these words. At bottom, we make old, we kill all those who love us, by the anxiety we cause them, by that kind of uneasy tenderness we inspire and ceaselessly put in a state of alarm. If we can see in a beloved body the slow work of destruction side by side with the painful fondness which rouses it, see the faded eyes, the hair long rebelliously black at last vanquished like the rest and growing white, the arteries hardened, the kidneys choked up, the heart strained, courage gone before life, the walk slackened and heavy, the spirit

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knowing it can hope for nothing yet unwearingly rebounding with invincible hopes, the gaiety even, innate and seemingly immortal, which made such a pleasant companion for sadness, now finally exhausted, perhaps the one who can see this, in that tardy moment of lucidity which even lives most bewitched by idle fancies may have, for even Don Quixote had such a moment, perhaps that one, like Henri van Blarenberghe when he had dispatched his mother with a blow of the dagger, would shrink from the horror of his life and rush for a revolver so that he might die at once. In most men a vision so painful (supposing that they are able to rise to it) blots out immediately the slightest rays of the joy of living. But what joy, what reason for living, what life can withstand this vision? Which, the vision or the joy of living, is true, which is "the Truth"?

(*Translated by Barbara Anderson*)

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BOOKS

ANDRÉ GIDE AND THE LITERARY LIFE

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE. Volume I: 1889-1913. Translated and edited by Justin O'Brien. Knopf. $5.00.

Mr. O'Brien has done a wonderful job with very difficult materials. He has turned Gide's tight and sometimes all but ineffable periods into excellent English; and he has supplied the text with elaborate notes on the persons, books, and events mentioned by the author. Perhaps the notes are a little over-elaborate: need a reader of Gide be told who was the author of *Werther* or the *Vita Nuova?* Mr. O'Brien seems to have prepared the volume for a wide American public. One fears there is no such public for Gide, even with the Nobel prize in his pocket.

"I want to put in everything," said Gide of *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*; but he has not put everything into his journal, at least not consistently. We see very little of him in relation to his family. "Of everything concerning Em. (his wife) I forbid myself to speak here." She is here only a delicate and retiring person to whom he reads aloud evenings, to whom he writes daily when he is traveling. Like some nineteenth-century nobleman, Gide shuttles between the capital and his country estates. We observe a very little of his favorite Norman farm, its tradition-bound retainers, its old gardens where Gide experiments with flowers. But of the house in Auteuil (Paris) we see—or sense—only the library where he reads widely in several languages; the piano on which he plays Bach and Chopin; the bedroom in which he struggles night after night with insomnia; the desk where he writes his books, often slowly and painfully, in alternating fits of enthusiasm and weariness. A visit or two to a mysterious bank disposes of his business affairs. Of his fortune he writes gnomically: "wealth considered solely as a permission to work freely"; but a friend is quoted as saying of the very rich Valery Larbaud, "It is always a pleasure to meet someone in comparison to whom Gide is poor." Finally, concerning his sexual life he is, while not altogether

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silent, unexpectedly discreet. He tells us that he was virgin till he was twenty-three. Writing in 1911 of *Corydon,* his defense of homosexuality, he says that "the difficulty comes . . . from the fact that I must artificially revive a problem to which I have found (as far as I am concerned) a practical solution, so that, to tell the truth, it no longer bothers me."

Gide has dealt with all these matters in other books. He seems to intend his journal as a different kind of document, a document of the literary life. But this phrase must be understood in a very broad sense. Proust lived in order to write; Valéry wrote in order to live (or so he kept telling Gide in his weary later years—perhaps only to shock him); but both affirmed the impersonality of art. Gide has worked on the opposite principle. He writes in the journal in 1893: "I wanted to suggest, in the *Tentative amoureuse,* the influence of the book upon the one who is writing it, and during that very writing. As the book issues from us it changes us, modifying the course of our life." Like any nineteenth-century master he has regarded his work as a sort of continuous autobiography. His journal is thus the medium in which his mind, his work, his reading, his friendships, are seen in their relations. The very first entry, for Autumn 1889, shows Gide and Pierre Louys in search of a Latin Quarter garret "where our group can meet." They are rather theatrical about their literary beginnings: they remember Rastignac. "And together we dream of the impecunious student's life in such a room, with an unfettered pen as the only means of earning a living. And at your feet, on either side of the writing table, all Paris."

This early dream of the literary life quickly gives way to bitter realities. The journals are among the most disenchanted of documents. Goethe, supposedly fortunate, remarked that in fact he had never been happy for more than a few days together. For Gide life seems to have been even worse, and social life a profound irritant. He finds—or at any rate he records—little pleasure in his relations with the literary commune of France and Europe. This commune always resolves itself, for him, into distinct personalities to whom his reactions are shifting and sensitive. Reactions!—his extremely individualistic sensibility drenches him in reactions, permits him to take almost nothing and nobody for granted. He is, it is true, regularly devoted to a few friends: Marcel Drouin, Jacques Copeau, Charles-Louis Philippe—the latter's death and funeral provoke one of the most beautiful passages in the present journal. Valéry bullies him, exhausts him with his superior *élan,* talks nonsense in the passion of his eloquence. Towards the others Gide's feelings vacillate between affection and disgust. At worst, literary men are all vanity,

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blague, and corruption. On the reception, in 1907, of Barrès into the Academy: "How I like his thin face, his flattened-down hair, even his common accent. What a flat speech he made! And how I suffered from the touches of cowardice, the flatteries, the concessions to the opinion of the audience, which are perhaps natural to him (I mean for which he probably did not have to distort his thought, but which met a too easy applause here); and also his thrust at Zola!" In particular, Gide is quick to scent clashes between spirit and talent, self and career. "Too much intelligence and not enough personality," he writes in 1890 of Léon Blum, then a member of his "group." A similar judgment is made again and again, on Pierre Louys, on Anatole France, etc. Intelligence, literary professionalism—the very traits Americans admire in the French —are held by Gide in high suspicion.

From literary society he takes refuge in various things. He travels in Spain, Africa, Italy. "Flee! Ah! flee farther to the south and towards a more total exile." Country landscapes and country weather inspire some of his most ecstatic entries. He seems, however, to find most relief in reading; and it is significant that he particularly enjoys English novels—much life, little art, few ideas.

His disgust with the world is paralleled by his disgust with himself. An early entry tells how he broke with the Protestant discipline of his childhood: "Whereupon, ceasing to call my desires temptations, ceasing to resist them, I strove on the contrary to follow them. . . . I was amazed that nature was so beautiful, and I called everything nature." This, like the literary dream of the Latin Quarter garret, resounds with a hopefulness that is seldom echoed by the later entries. For Protestantism, as he tells us, he too often merely substituted other strict disciplines, among which was the keeping of this journal, the ordeal of self-analysis. And he is reputed to be a great artist of self-analysis: his American publishers are advertising the journal as a modern equivalent of Montaigne's essays. Here one must take exception. Fascinating as Gide is in this respect, he is very far from the great masters of introspection. Augustine liked to compare the vistas of the inner life, terrible as their content might be, to the beauty of "vast courts," of "caves and caverns," of "fields and splendid palaces." Montaigne was a melancholy but passionately amused spectator of self. Proust, more tragic than Montaigne, was also more deeply convinced of the grandeur of mind. Now Gide has an undoubted place in this tradition, if only because he, too, writes splendidly about himself. He is even capable of a witty detachment: "I am merely a little boy having a good time—compounded with a Protestant minister who

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bores him." But this spirit is rare in the journal. To Gide, on the whole, introspection is not an art, not even an objective study, but a punitive expedition. He records his moments of vanity, of aimlessness, of indiscretion just as Lafcadio celebrates each sign of weakness in himself by plunging a knife into his thigh. He writes: "Through my heredity, which interbreeds in me two very different systems of life, can be explained this complexity and these contradictions from which I suffer." Gide suffers from complexity, from contradictions, where Montaigne and Proust and even, I think, Augustine, rejoiced in them. And they could rejoice in this way, they could even construct a kind of aesthetic of introspection, because to them the self was ultimately an image of mankind. In the journal Gide's self-analysis too often begins and ends with Gide.

"The endless boredom I inspire in myself" is the subject of numerous entries; and it must be confessed that the journal, at any rate this early installment of it, sometimes bores the reader. No doubt Gide's ennui and self-mistrust are essentially matters of temperament; but surely they have been inflamed by his search for a metaphysical selfhood, a selfhood independent of the social conditions which, for most of us, are simply the conditions of existence. His greatest tales—*La Symphonie Pastorale* or *Les Caves du Vatican*—transcend this personal limit, for in writing them he accepted, in his own way, a different set of conditions, the conditions of art. But there is another and perhaps simpler reason for the deficiencies of the journal. It seems a strange charge to bring against a writer noted for his frankness, but perhaps the journals suffer from too much discretion. One feels that Gide suppresses details of his domestic and sexual life which, if included, might have helped to clarify his melancholy. As it is, his melancholy seems a little in excess of the circumstances, as T. S. Eliot said of Hamlet.

But Mr. O'Brien warns us against trying to judge the entire journal by this first installment, and he is probably right. From a slight acquaintance with the whole work as published in France in 1939, I should guess that the later sections were the more engrossing. Gide's personality became increasingly relevant, increasingly heroic, beside the grim orthodoxies—Catholic, Communist, imperialist—with which it had to contend after 1914. One might say that history gave his individualism a content and a *raison d'etre.*

F. W. Dupee

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FAMILY ALBUM

THE TIMES OF MELVILLE AND WHITMAN. By Van Wyck Brooks. E. P. Dutton & Co. $5.00.

With the publication of this volume Mr. Brooks takes himself entirely beyond the reach of the opinion, usually uttered with a mournful acerbity, that his work has fallen away from the fine critical intelligence of his early days. For it is clear from *The Times of Melville and Whitman,* if it was ever left in doubt by the earlier volumes of his account of American literature, that Mr. Brooks is not writing literary criticism at all and does not want to. Nor does he want to write literary history as that is usually understood. As for intelligence, he is not concerned with it. One has the impulse to describe his enterprise as an act of piety—until one remembers that in some sense every literary act is an act of piety, a commemoration of saints and heroes and an alliance with them, and that acts of piety can also be acts of intelligence. One must say then that Mr. Brooks is engaged in an act of piety of a particular, of a very simple, sort: an act of family piety.

The very rhetoric proclaims the nature of the enterprise. Mr. Brooks has perfectly assumed the character of that member of the family who holds in proud and capacious memory every last fact of family existence; it is not that such a person has no ability to select but that he has no wish to select—the more anecdotes, portraits, letters, muniments, eccentricities, candlesticks, silver thimbles, hunting crops, and Malay krises he can collect the more he can make the family resemble a nation or a universe, the more he can be sure it is really there, for the family, considered as a long continuity, is always threatening to show itself as a mere figment. Hence Mr. Brooks's concern with simultaneity: "When General Lee died in 1870 with three of the older Southern writers. . . ."—it is not a death-pact but a reassuring reticulation of event, the family web made that much finer. As happens with every family historian, in the degree that Mr. Brooks remembers his antecedents, his pronouns forget theirs:

> Major John Richardson, the author of *Wacousta,* the best of the Canadian novelists, was outside the circle, the disciple of Cooper who died in New York, a pauper, forgotten even at home, after selling his faithful dog for a morsel to live on. He was buried in an unknown grave in 1852, the year in which William North arrived from England, the journalist who had studied in Germany at one of the universities and whose style was full of German metaphysics. He had published a novel attacking Disraeli, entitled *Anti-Coningsby.* . . . At twenty-eight he killed himself with a draught of prussic acid, and a few years later Stephen

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Foster, whom all the writers might have known, was picked up dying in the slums where he had been living. While Henry Clapp and Ada Clare held their Bohemian court at Pfaff's, Foster had slept in Bowery lodging-houses. . . .

And indeed it does not much matter who is who. In the compost-democracy of the great American family, discrimination is not in place. The world holds Uncle Walt and Uncle Herman in special esteem and so they are talked about at greater length, yet within the judgment of the family it is not perfectly established that they are really more valuable than Cousin Bret—of the California branch, but originally he came from New York—or any of the many score of the connection. Uncle Walt had a very warm family feeling, much to his credit; as for Herman, was it quite kind of him to keep so much to himself in his later years and to take so gloomy a view of things?

It is impossible to take seriously Mr. Brooks's effort to show how very real and nice and established the family has always been, how many people of charm and sensibility it has numbered. Yet it would not be fair to dismiss his enterprise as being wholly without point. For Mr. Brooks responds to a real fact. To most Americans, even literate and literary Americans, the American past is very little inhabited. Nothing in the world is sadder than the statue of an American hero, standing naked of memory or interest. The greatest of our literary figures have the greatness of isolation or distance rather than of community and intimacy: we make our voyages to them and are much refreshed, but they are likely to remain the object of our intelligent tourist's curiosity. When it comes to the easily usable social tradition of literature, it sometimes seems that a foreigner, Tocqueville, speaks more immediately than any American across the American decades. And quite apart from literature and greatness, the ordinary day-to-day human past seems to exist in the American mind as attenuated, alien, even hostile in its discontinuousness with the present.

If this is true, it is not new—Henry Adams remarked the Civil War generals, the men who had saved the Union, walking empty and bewildered, their deed having no significance to the people among whom they walked and scarcely to themselves. And if it is true, it is not a sentimentality to regret it, for a nation without a living sense of its past is as deficient as a person in the same deprived case. But Mr. Brooks's enterprise is to be harshly judged precisely because it sets out to fill so genuine a lack but fills it so badly, for with a high devotion and a really grandiose ideal of scholarship it supplies America with a literary past of the blandest and most genteel sort, calculated to give

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pleasure only to the Philistine and to draw the mind and heart of no one, not even of the Philistine.

Lionel Trilling

FICTION CHRONICLE

THE STOIC. By Theodore Dreiser. Doubleday. $3.00.
THE REPRIEVE. By Jean-Paul Sartre. Translated by Eric Sutton. Knopf. $3.00.
THE SURE HAND OF GOD. By Erskine Caldwell. Duell, Sloane, and Pearce. $2.75.
THE VICTIM. By Saul Bellow. Vanguard. $2.75.

The Stoic, Dreiser's last words on his great character, Frank Cowperwood, does not add much to this legendary man, but it is satisfying to have the full portrait. Fortunately, the most important part of the novel was finished before Dreiser's death and only the epilogue, adequately suggested in a condensation of his notes on the final chapter, is incomplete. *The Stoic* takes Cowperwood to London with ideas of building a subway system, continues the love affair with Berenice Fleming begun in *The Titan,* and ends with Cowperwood's death and the death of his second wife, Aileen Butler. The general plan of *The Financier* and *The Titan* is maintained, and again Dreiser has divided his novel between detailed accounts of Cowperwood's business schemes and an equally full report on his fantastic private life. The financial adventures, at the very center of the character as they are, providing the external symbol of Cowperwood's incredible energy and establishing his position in the world, are certainly necessary to the picture, but they seem somehow less fabulous than his love affairs, which are among the most bewildering in fiction. There is nobody quite like this man. His vitality, success, intelligence, and unfailing self-esteem are shared by James's Christopher Newman, and both are convincingly masculine and American, but there the similarity ends. Needless to say, Christopher Newman would not be caught dead with Cowperwood's women.

Surely there is more to Cowperwood's private life than appears on the surface. His promiscuity, as a mere fact of his existence, can be accepted very much as Dreiser accepts it, as the natural appetite of a powerful man, "too passionate, too radiant, too individual and complex to belong to any single individual alone." Dreiser defends Cowperwood's egoism against the common charges of moralists, but he does

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not question the specific meaning of these particular affairs. Psychologically Cowperwood is, if not depraved, certainly close to the perverse; and he is all the more startling and interesting because, as often happens, the author has fallen into step with his hero and moves so quickly and easily along with him that he forgets to censor his imagination. Dreiser knows he is dealing with an extraordinary man whose passions may force him outside conventional patterns. As it works out, Cowperwood seems not above the laws of society but forced below them by his compulsive attraction for taboo situations which even his intense romanticism cannot fully explain.

Most of all this great man has a passion for little, blue-eyed girls, preferably the daughters of business associates, and his boldness in snatching these girls away from their fathers is astounding. Child-women are his primary compulsion, but at times he is obliged to take a substitute—the unawakened wives of his friends. The wives, because of their tame husbands, are also children, a fact Cowperwood quickly recognizes and alters with unconscionable energy.

In *The Financier* he falls in love with a woman older than he, the phlegmatic wife of a phlegmatic friend. But as soon as he marries this emotionally virginal woman he seems to realize that he does not want symbolic childhood; he must have the real thing, the daughter of his business associate, Mr. Butler. This relationship with Aileen Butler is very close to an act of incest, because Cowperwood has been accepted in the Butler home as an adult, a married man, absolutely taboo as a lover. In a hair-raising and heart-breaking scene, Mr. Butler hires a detective (the first of a long series of morbid and significant spyings in these books) and discovers his beloved child and his friend in an assignation house. His horror is boundless. Dreiser sympathizes with the father's anguish—the Butlers are Catholic and the daughter can marry Cowperwood only by leaving the church—but he does not seem to realize that he has written a scene in which the horror runs much deeper. The father, as does another in Chicago, experiences a primitive revulsion for this unthinkable union, and both men feel the offender has proved himself unfit for society. In all of these embarrassing events Cowperwood remains calm, showing the neurotic fearlessness and aggression that amount to exhibitionism.

Cowperwood divorces his wife and marries Aileen, but Aileen cannot satisfy him. In *The Titan* countless other affairs follow, more detectives are employed to trail the characters around, discover meeting places, get the "dirt," supply keys to secret apartments. How is one to

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explain this passion for spying? The *voyeur* is invariably lurking in the exhibitionist, according to Freud. In the first big "discovery" scene it was Cowperwood himself who was discovered by the father, and not to anyone's deep distress except the father's. In the second scene it is Cowperwood who puts a man on the trail of a young mistress, gets the key to the apartment and, after listening outside the door, triumphantly bursts in upon them. There are so many instances of detection in the trilogy that one forgets the precise intrigue that occasioned them; in addition, there are innumerable acts of sublimated exhibitionism, as when Cowperwood blithely buys a lover for his wife or advises a mistress for the husband of the woman with whom he is having an affair. Somehow he manages to be at every bedside.

However, it is the combination of neurotic display and a suggestion of incest that most appeals to the hero and these compulsions dominate the love affairs in *The Stoic*. Here Cowperwood has an affair with a twenty-year-old grandniece who thinks, "Frank Cowperwood, her granduncle, really her own flesh and blood, and her lover!"

The most significant affair and the one about which Dreiser is most sentimental is the affair with Berenice Fleming, started in *The Titan* and continued in *The Stoic*. Cowperwood falls in love with the photograph of a twelve-year-old girl which he sees in a bawdy house operated by the girl's mother. The girl is Berenice; Cowperwood "befriends" the family and finally wins the daughter; in London, Berenice while posing as his *ward* becomes his mistress; she is hardly twenty, and Cowperwood is sixty. Here is his ideal at last. In the light of all this it is perhaps natural that Cowperwood, seeking the actual fulfillment of obsessive relationships, is one of the most indifferent fathers in fiction. He has a daughter and a son, but they are given to the first wife and hardly mentioned again. Perhaps it is just as well the daughter does not reappear.

There is a great deal of true pathos in *The Stoic,* not so much if read as a single novel, but if considered along with the earlier volumes. At his death Cowperwood's affairs are hopelessly mixed up and he does not succeed in leaving a large fortune or in giving his art collection (that baggage of every fictional capitalist and more than ever unconvincing in the case of Cowperwood) to the public. None of the memorials he had planned survive; however, the one thing that does survive him is Berenice and she builds a hospital in his name. The conclusion of the book is hard to interpret. After her father-lover's death, Berenice goes to India and the last pages of Dreiser's writing career are largely devoted to quotations from Hindu philosophy, which may mean that

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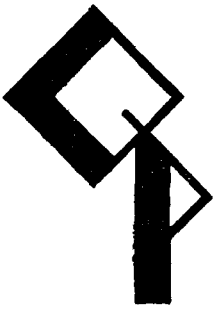

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in the end he became somewhat distrustful of his old determinism.

The writing in *The Stoic* is worse than ever, but Cowperwood flourishes in the dungeon of Dreiser's rhetoric with the same hardy cheerfulness that helped him to endure his real imprisonment in Philadelphia. His reality is achieved by character in action and the three books about him are another of Dreiser's victories over the hesitations of any critical reader.

In *The Reprieve,* the second volume of Sartre's trilogy, we are a long, long way from Cowperwood's illustrious career, his gigantic successes and failures, his magnificence. Sartre's characters do not advance to tragic knowledge of the world in old age; instead they experience stoicism, failure, and meaninglessness in their teens and at the age of thirty the hero, Mathieu, has, by comparison with Cowperwood, almost given up the ghost. This is fitting: Cowperwood's self-assurance, his triumphant will, his brilliant possibilities are preserved in our day only by paretics, locked up in asylums, where they may sell the other inmates portions of the Brooklyn Bridge.

In *The Reprieve* there is at least one magnificent shadow and that is Sartre himself, whom one imagines perched on a rooftop in Paris taking down in rapid shorthand the conversation below him. And in the evenings there he is again: sitting in a hundred cafés, the guest in every drawing room, the historian of every love affair. He is completely democratic, so much so that he has given himself an impossible task, an entire nation on the wing.

Sartre has chosen eight of the most dramatic days in recent history, the week beginning with France's mobilization and ending in the Munich pact. The prospect of an immediate war brings every man face to face with himself; the future is uncertain, the past unimportant, the present is everything. To create the atmosphere of national crisis everyone must be in the book, and instead of the usual tight drama with a few actors Sartre has devised a loose, overflowing, chaotic pageant with dozens of characters, some of whom seem to be speaking at the same time. He does not hesitate to shift from one speaker to the other without notice. The reader, gratefully coming upon Mathieu, Ivich, or Daniel, whose personality he knows from *The Age of Reason,* learns that they have not the slightest superiority over the new characters about whom nothing is known.

The large scope of the book enables it to suggest a great deal and prevents it from defining anything. This is frustrating, but Sartre does

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manage, from page to page, to make a book that ought to be unreadable actually quite exciting. Somehow these shifting fragments, snatches of conversation, street brawls, and departures of soldiers holds one's interest for the entire length, over four hundred pages. The pace is largely maintained by the wonderfully natural dialogue which, though not always philosophical or profound, is invariably revealing, clever, and utterly lifelike. And if the exact situation of the characters is unclear, the few glimpses we have of them are vivid and dramatic.

The book ends with a well-handled irony: the Munich pact. In the final paragraph Daladier steps down from the plane expecting to be mobbed for appeasing Germany. Instead he is applauded and the people think the terrible nightmare of the last week was unnecessary, there will be no war, demobilization will follow immediately. Throughout the book the use of real historical characters is so witty and precise one wishes Sartre had done more with them. (For instance the wonderful moment when Neville Chamberlain, after listening to one of Hitler's most outrageous speeches, says, "Well, there's nothing new there.")

The Reprieve is an achievement of some sort. It is vague and rather superficial, but is does sparkle with an uncommon enthusiasm that should not be held too cheaply. What one finds himself admiring is the gaiety and humanity of a writer genuinely interested in his material.

It is precisely the lack of real interest in his subjects that makes Erskine Caldwell's production of one novel after another a doomed and desperate act. Caldwell is frantic, bewildered, obviously disoriented as a writer. As he continues to increase and multiply, begetting failures, it becomes harder and harder to remember that his early work was a true, though slight, contribution to American literature. At times, as in the latest novel, *The Sure Hand of God,* he seems to realize that he must go backward to *God's Little Acre* and *Tobacco Road* since he clearly cannot go forward. And even this does not work. In the two early novels and some of his excellent short stories Caldwell was a creative primitive and there is every reason why these books, which are fantasies, should have been much admired here and in Europe. Those two amazing nymphomaniacs, Darling Jill and Griselda, and the incredibly ribald Jeeter Lester are authentic creations of low comedy and their irrepressible lewdness is closer to surrealism than to social documentation. These books are first-rate dirty jokes, extending the situation of the farmer's daughter and the amorous old man to the limit. But this sort of thing cannot be repeated very often. *The Sure Hand of God* tries to turn back

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the clock to the early comedy; it is the story of another lascivious mother and a warm daughter. But the story is false, repetitious, sentimental, and even a bit disgusting; the jokes fall flat and the lust is forced. Caldwell has lost touch with his people; the primitive has grown up into the smoking-car story teller.

Unlike Faulkner, Caldwell never had a scheme or a myth to sustain him, not even a useful framework. His best work was always anecdotal. Perhaps he might have continued to be a readable writer if he had been content with the fantastic, embraced it frankly and consciously, and thereby evolved some form that could express the gift for exaggerated folk humor he has, or at least *had*. However, this is too much to expect; it requires a greater belief in humor than Caldwell seems to share. He tried to extend himself through ready-made Communist doctrines, but with such dull results that a good case might be made for him as the American writer most misused by his own Stalinism. Still one sympathizes with him. He became a writer during the worst possible period for his strange gifts, and his fame was always falsely attached to the literature of moral and social significance. No doubt his admirers are still those who could not bear to support his nymphomaniacs and satyrs without an easy assurance that this wild entertainment is "serious." Caldwell shares their uncertainty about his talents. He has never been a strong enough man to be faithful to his wanton angel.

But things are looking up. It would have been enough if Saul Bellow's second book had been merely as good as his first, *Dangling Man,* and how fine it is to discover that it, *The Victim,* is much better. On the basis of these two novels it would be hard to think of any young writer who has a better chance than Bellow to become the redeeming novelist of his period. *The Victim* is less episodic than the earlier book; it is more objective, not so cramped and uncertain; and fortunately there has been no loss of intellectual animation, no retreat from difficulties. The writing is unpretentious and very fine.

It is not easy to condense the imaginative situation that lies at the center of the novel. *The Victim* is the story of Asa Leventhal, a white-collar worker for the trade magazines, a somewhat dispirited man who looks backward to the humiliations of the depression and forward to a life that can only in the most limited sense be called successful. Leventhal has just barely managed to pull through; he has survived. And then suddenly in the heat of a New York summer, with his wife out of town and the illness of his brother's child necessitating trips to Staten Island which produce dreary criticism at the office, Leventhal is con-

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fronted with a moral and personal problem of extreme complexity. This problem is Kirby Allbee, a New England man fallen into the gutter, an alcoholic, a shabby, deteriorating member of the middle class, furious with resentments and outraged vanity. Allbee has not survived; his wife is dead and he has been unemployed for years, living in flop houses, bitterly paying for his maladjustment. Who is to blame for his debasement? Allbee believes the Jews are to blame and that Leventhal is particularly and concretely guilty.

The two men had met years ago at a party. Allbee, though an indecent anti-Semite, nevertheless gave Leventhal, who was out of a job, a letter to his employer. During the interview Leventhal lost his temper and argued with the employer over the matter of technical qualifications for the position. The employer became enraged and fired Allbee merely for having recommended Leventhal. Or is that why Allbee was fired? What about his drinking, his unstable character? The question of the novel is not whether Allbee deserved his fate, but how much Leventhal is to blame for the fortuitous results of his actions.

Allbee begins to pursue Leventhal. What does he want? More than anything else he seems to want Leventhal to recognize the possibility of his guilt. Leventhal must be forced to share Allbee's downfall, a condition that is accomplished brilliantly. Allbee moves into Leventhal's dull but orderly life, bringing with him alcoholic disorder, unpredictability, vice, and frightening confusion. Leventhal, the family man, the plodding, exhausted survivor of a bleak childhood, is soon surrounded by dirt, lice, empty whisky bottles, illicit sexuality—all the madness of a willful urge for self-destruction, an urge which Allbee conceives of as peculiarly Gentile. Leventhal, never having had Allbee's great expectations for happiness, is disgusted by what seems the entirely avoidable chaos in Allbee's character. (Why can't he pull himself together? Why can't he stop drinking?) The conclusion—and there is not just one conclusion in this haunting collision of character—seems to be that both men are somewhat released when Leventhal, by a series of actions, accepts not so much his guilt for Allbee's condition but the possibility that, despite their antipathetic natures, each owes something to the other, if only the admission that no one can ever be sure of being truly blameless for the evil around him.

This short comment does little justice to the many levels of meaning in *The Victim*. And it should be added that whatever meaning there is in the book is contained in the situation in which the characters find themselves and not in the surrounding rhetoric. More than anything else

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it is this thorough and exquisite honesty that distinguishes Bellow's writing.

Elizabeth Hardwick

OID SOUL MAD AGAINE

REMEMBER TO REMEMBER. By Henry Miller. Volume II of The Air-Conditioned Nightmare. New Directions. $3.75.

Each new book by Henry Miller sends me back to *Tropic of Cancer* to find out what I could ever have seen in the man. And each time it is hard to stop reading that book: as hard as it is to finish anything he has written since. What has happened?

Only a psychologist, of course, could supply a conclusive answer; but some literary formulations may at least justify the question. To begin with, *Tropic of Cancer* is objective; it is *there,* a brute fact. Miller's later writings—even the best of them, *Black Spring* and *The Colossus of Maroussi*—are more in the nature of gestures. Sometimes, indeed, they verge on the gesticulation, the posture. They are, in short, willed responses to experience, rather than spontaneous statements of it. Let me illustrate—strictly *à la Miller.* In *Tropic of Cancer,* Paris sidewalk urinals are part of the scenery, written into the book. In *Black Spring,* his second book, they are written about, the subject of an essay. A brilliant and charming one, but an essay none the less. Again, in *Tropic of Cancer* he can say about Paris: "She is like a whore. From a distance she seems ravishing, you can't wait until you have her in your arms. And five minutes later you feel empty, disgusted with yourself. You feel tricked." Compare this—a momentary feeling, of course, but there and written in—with the paeans to Paris in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare.* The whore is an angel now, even though a fallen one; and I do not feel that Miller is at his ease among angels. On their side, yes; but anybody can be that. In his current dreams and visions of universal peace, change of heart, heroic sculpture in San Francisco, Miller resembles the person about whom Walter Pater remarked: "He does remind me of, well, a steam engine stuck in the mud. But he is so enthusiastic."

Besides, and because of, the objectivity (objectness, thingitude) of *Tropic of Cancer,* there is its style: fresh, buoyant, effortless. Even in its meditative sections—rapid, brief evocations of decay and doom, such as still appear, but swollen to intolerable length, in his later books

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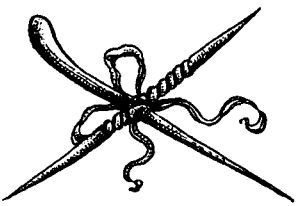

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—*Tropic of Cancer* flows. Clichés, platitudes, literary echoes are swept along in the stream, unnoticed. But now we get whole pages of earnest, sticky dullness: "If the caterpillar through sleep can metamorphose into a butterfly, surely man during his long night of travail must discover the knowledge and the power to redeem himself," etc.

Certainly, something has happened. A French critic put it very simply: "Perhaps, in *Tropic of Cancer,* Miller said everything." But this needs qualification. I see *Tropic of Cancer* as a text on which the later works are commentaries. A commentary is not entirely ancillary to its text; it may have new qualities and insights of its own; but the interpretation is always less than the thing interpreted. Besides, Miller is not an artist. In itself, this doesn't matter. Neither is God, as Sartre said, speaking of Mauriac. But an artist can make his books seem different and similar at the same time: illusion, after all, is his business.

Miller's concern is with the truth about himself. All his books, as he confesses in this latest one, are installments of an autobiography, even though large parts of them purport to be criticism or philosophy. *Remember to Remember,* then, is the fifth installment of Miller's life-story to be brought out by New Directions, his principal American publisher. Since his sea change from Paris pavements to a rock on the Pacific—his re-expatriation—his dominant theme has been disgust with the American way of life, a feeling kept bitterly constant by recurring memories of Europe. The title-piece of *Remember to Remember,* like "*Vive la France!*" in the preceding volume, may be taken as typical of this prevailing mood. "I prefer the corrupt world of Europe. I prefer the maggots which crawl. I prefer the song of the flesh, even though that flesh be rotting. While there is still a body there will be spirit. . . . There has been so little evidence of the spirit here in America that one grows accustomed to thinking of it in terms of negation." Interwoven with this reinterpretation of Miller's European experience are two other strands: the praise of friends, and general comments on the moral state of the world.

Miller has found a few oases in the American desert, some natives who impress him as talented for art or living. Those of whom he writes in these volumes are mostly artists—painters, sculptors, musicians—but there are also plain "ragged individualists," including a saloon-keeper, a convicted murderer, and a novel-writing bootblack. Five chapters of *Remember to Remember,* with parts of its preface and parts of other sections, portray and celebrate such people, whom Miller seems to consider fellow originals, in traditional romantic style—as heroic rebels

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ignored or badgered by the Philistines. The chapters on Rattner, Bufano, DeLaney, Varda, and Deeter, and the corresponding parts of the first volume are among the best things Miller has done since leaving Europe. Havelock Ellis said that a man is always right in his affirmations, always wrong in his denials. Certainly Miller's denials—his angry rejections of certain American values, in which he may be quite right in the usual sense—are less alive, less right creatively, than his affirmation, possibly wrong, of the moral and artistic stature of his pet colossi, with its bold assumption that people will be led to admire them simply by his words and by photographs of their faces rather than by examples of their works. As prophet, judge, prosecuting attorney in the trial of civilization, Miller is a flop. This is less obvious when, as in *Tropic of Cancer,* his apocalyptic visions are integral to an earthy text. Far too much of the present book is taken up by "Murder the Murderer," an indictment of legalized violence as an instrument of policy, along with most other features of the present scene in international affairs. Among Millerites this piece seems to have acquired the standing of a great anti-war tract. It is not great, not anti-war (Miller is all for war as a catalyzer of the civilization he hates), and less a tract than a stream of semiconsciousness, a long, loud, and redundant blast of wind, like many let loose by otherwise able writers to distract from their inadequacy to the demands of a tough problem. Even a Miller enthusiast writing in the American number of *Horizon* can find nothing more flattering to say of the intellectual content of this utterance, apart from its courage as an act, than that "in the simplest terms it said the same thing most radicals had said five or ten years before."

This brings me to a question which has exercised many of Miller's critics—the "dated" quality of the views and attitudes expressed in his American books. What is more stale, in 1947, than "the truth about American materialism" as told by the Sinclairs and Lewises since 1910, or the exhilarations of Paris as felt by the Steins and Hemingways in days that sometimes seem still more remote? Is not the earnest retelling of these things by Miller a sign of "immaturity," of "protracted adolescence"? Yes, it is stale and silly, but also *sympathique.* It is something, after all, to have an American writer who cheerfully admits being an eternal adolescent (his friends call him an "old soul," he says), and creates furors in the Hearst press and the pseudo-cultural magazines simply by being an old-fashioned bohemian. The attitude may be dated, but Miller's success with it shows that his environment is just as dated, if not more so. As far as I know, he is the only living American writer

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whom people under twenty-five take seriously as a new, original influence, unsullied by the approval of Cultural Authority. I have often wondered who is read by the young nowadays as my contemporaries used to read Lawrence and Huxley and Eliot and Joyce. For a time it seemed to be Thomas Wolfe, which was depressing. But, if I may judge by a few recent conversations, it is Henry Miller now. Moral: all is not lost; or *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

Frank Jones

THE POLITICAL IMAGINATION

THE MIDDLE OF THE JOURNEY. By Lionel Trilling. Viking. $3.00.

Gide once noted that if skepticism is sometimes the beginning of wisdom it is often the end of art. Mr. Trilling's wisdom as well as his art is the consequence of his skepticism—his disenchantment with the liberal ideologies of the thirties and his exploration of the dark and uncertain business of the ego that eventually expresses itself in opinions, positions held, in all our devotions to abstract systems. Laskell in this novel, like Strether in the Jamesian fiction, is one of the persons upon whom none of our present malaise is lost as he returns to life from the great white peace of his sickness, and, during his summer in Connecticut, emancipates himself turn by purgatorial turn from the unexamined attitudes of those about him: the liberal optimism of his host Arthur Croom, the hard social idealism of Nancy Croom, the possessive benevolence of Kermit Simpson, the fierce revolutionary program of Maxim and his equally fierce defection to religion. The pain and confusion of the world—Laskell's abortive attraction to Emily Caldwell, the death of her daughter, the eruption of Maxim into the quaint liberal order established among the Crooms, the evidences of a coming struggle for power—are the intellectual history of the thirties interpreted through Laskell's sensibility of skepticism. Conflicts of opinion are profound fissures within the modern condition, a dim and slow disintegration of the outward and inward world. To desert a cause is to upset the moral equilibrium.

Trilling had already argued that the question of power has been forced upon us, and that the romantic revolutionism of the bourgeoisie, their excited humanitarianism, their surrender to programs, abstractions, utopian visions—all, in fact, that the Crooms represent—is either a projection of the will or an evasion. The dramatic contradiction between the liberal intention to make a conscious, intelligent choice and the

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calamitous "badness and stupidity" of liberal action he can explain only as a failure in both mind and imagination—for politics require both.

If Trilling's direction has been political, his vision as an artist has been psychological. With an intense impressionability he has looked at the social commitments of the individual through the deep, unknown motives operating within the self. Somehow they must be brought, as he says, into relation with the known. His criticism has been a function of the imagination, and his most inward exploration of the deeper self has been "The Other Margaret," his story in which the child discovers through her response to the *other* Margaret "the insupportable fact of her own moral life."

The texture of his novel remains psychological, though not so uniformly as in his short stories. Trilling's awareness of unadmitted motives is everywhere—the impulses of Laskell and Maxim to show the snapshots of the dead Elizabeth, Laskell's offering thirty dollars to Maxim, his quoting the sonnet to Nancy, his twisting his ankle while Emily bathes, his pursuit of Duck, his devotion to the rose, his nameless terror. The dimensions of these passages are wonderfully verbal, as they are in James; in both writers the psychological elaboration is wrought by a verbal elaboration and abstraction until the ambiguity between literature and analysis is heightened and the imagery expands indeterminately into the symbolism of the great mural figures of suffering and power about Maxim, or the brown wind rushing at Laskell in the afternoon sunlight.

The most daring feats of the novel occur precisely when the psychological texture is broken, for example in the violence of Susan's death at the hand of her father Duck, and at the church social where Maxim portentously challenges the minister. In these scenes Trilling has presumed—doubtless in the strength of his academic breeding—to project his fiction backward to a plane of Victorian narrative. Is there another "serious" modern novelist who would risk the grotesque confrontation of Maxim, the revolutionary monster, with the harmless, pastoral Reverend Gurney? Or of bland Kermit with the terrible patronage of Miss Walker? Or consider the peril to narrative texture in the melodramatic death of Susan—without contrivance, indirection, or evasion!

If the texture is not uniform, the intelligence of the critique is completely sustained. Laskell has undertaken to dispel the mythological views of the thirties. His Purgatory is a succession of disenchantments—disillusion about the *relation* of Maxim to his ideas; the administrative good will of Arthur Croom; the furtive callousness of Nancy with her disingenuous wish for a life of danger and morality;

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the enlightenment of Kermit, who buys his humanity from the workers he treats well; the nihilism of Duck, the inadequate man-in-the-street; the hollow independence of the Folgers; the devouring guilt of the converted Maxim. Only Emily maintains herself against disenchantment; she, and Susan, for Trilling shares James's resignation to the innocence of the child, irresponsible and uninvolved in the power and suffering of the world. Laskell's final skepticism, marking his political maturity, is his surrender of middle-class hope for the future.He will not throw his expectations before him as a manufactured and fictitious life. He will live here and now, in a present that is temporal in an almost Bergsonian way. Neither Arthur, the man of the near future, nor Maxim, the bloody apocalyptic man of the far future, is eligible to live with Laskell's new sense of immediacy and responsibility.

In surrendering the future, Laskell also renounces the carefully masked will of every intellectual to impose his program upon the world. In his last encounter with Maxim the struggle for power is defined in its naked alternatives. Maxim offers him a choice between competing systems—the secular law of rights for the masses, or the Augustinian law of duty for the leaders. In this collision of forces Laskell, the "Renaissance" man who is responsible and intelligent, appears doomed. But he does not admit the necessity of this inhuman dialectic: "I do not acquiesce." He will not, like Maxim, vanish as a person. And he is hated by the Crooms and Maxim, whose absolute systems codify their will to power; neither can tolerate Laskell's skepticism, or any "appearance of an idea in modulation."

Maxim virtually admits that his apocalyptic will cannot survive any modulation of an idea. He can enslave Laskell if Laskell defends himself with ferocity; for then Laskell is a fanatic, a victim of the dialectic. But he cannot enslave the tenacious flexible critical intelligence, the skeptical sensibility.

Thus Trilling pays his greatest debt not to the Renaissance as Burckhardt conceived it, but to Matthew Arnold, who was approximately in his own position, a liberal attempting a moral critique of liberalism. The bane of the middle class, Arnold said, is its hard unintelligence, its lack of responsible individualism. Against evasions, codes, partial views, and the hatreds of Jacobinism, Arnold appealed to the saving remnant who could modulate their intelligence into a political instrument. There was, for Arnold, no one law of human development: "The human spirit is wider than the most priceless of the forces which bear it onward." The flexibility of the critical mind, its toleration, its distrust of abstrac-

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tion, its imagination and immediacy dispel mythological expectations and moderate the will to power. Trilling moves, like Arnold, between two worlds, and his faculty of criticism and disinterestedness assumes the proportions of culture, a political activity. In Gide, too, the protestant intelligence is a means of living immediately. "Everything in life," writes Gide, "must be intentional, and the will constantly taut like a muscle." But Gide's intentions are often released in the gratuitous action, the noncritical behavior of the immoralist. The intentions of Arnold and Trilling are expressed in neither the gratuitous act nor the concealed struggle for power, but in a strenuousness of choice from moment to moment that removes apocalyptic visions and programs into the distance of irrelevancy. The political man survives so long as the critical imagination remains as tenacious and discriminating as it is in Laskell.

Trilling lately complained that the liberal ideology has failed to produce any of the real emotions of literature, that liberals have written mere works of piety. His remark must now be qualified. His own novel has carried the liberal mind deep within the imagination.

Wylie Sypher

THE LIFE OF THE NOVEL

THE LIVING NOVEL. A Journey of Rediscovery. By V. S. Pritchett. Reynal & Hitchcock. $2.75.

V. S. Pritchett undertook these thirty-two studies of novelists at a time when the pressures of war forced him to break off work on a novel of his own. The interruption by cataclysm suggested a reconsideration of the past, and he put the interval to creative use by reading good novels of all periods afresh, as if they had just come into being. He wanted to discover from these earlier novels just what a good novel of the present ought to be. Such an undertaking at such a time is hardly conceivable for the more public American novelists, whose non-fictional writing is devoted to public affairs and who, if they talk about art at all, do it in general and self-justifying terms. Can we believe that the later work of our Bromfields, Lewises, Steinbecks, and Caldwells would be quite so crude and flavorless if they had been able to bring themselves to read other authors' work with anything of Pritchett's objectivity? Even in the critical reviews there is conspicuously little writing on the novel by practising novelists compared to the writing on poetry by poets and on criticism by critics. This is a contemporary, not a na-

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tional question, since the situation is similar in France and England.

The effect of Pritchett's brief essays is not to make revolutionary interpretations, of which we already have so many, but to restore individual novels to their proper shapes and sizes, to recover them from the fragmentation and distortion of excessively analytical conceptualist criticism. Pritchett lets us see around books as encompassable wholes, as figures detached from their grounds, and above all as experiences to be enjoyed. Undramatic and unpolemic, *The Living Novel* nevertheless permits a comforting inference. It makes it possible to believe that the trouble with the contemporary novel is not the exhaustion of the form or the absence of new sights and insights to extend the form—there is certainly a wealth of these in our new moral humanism—but simply a temporary lack of educated interest among the novelists themselves in the quality of their medium, in the novel as a mediating element with characteristics of its own, with insistence, and integrity, and even a kind of refractoriness, which make it something very different from a reflecting mirror, or from an open door through which the novelist and reader can pass to more immediate social and spiritual concerns.

Since Pritchett was interested in good novels generally, and not merely the best, his sixty or so examples include a number of works by minor writers—*The Real Charlotte* by Somerville and Ross, or *The Hole in the Wall* by Arthur Morrison, or *Moonfleet* by Falkner—and a number of minor works by major writers—like Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband* or Smollett's *Travels Through France and Italy*. And he includes works which are well known in their own countries but not widely read abroad, like Mérimée's *Chronicle of Charles IX*, Verga's *Mastro-Don Gesualdo*, and Shchedrin's *The Golovlyov Family*. Perhaps because of the war, no German works are mentioned, which is rather a pity, because I should think many of the minor nineteenth-century German writers, like those discussed in E. K. Bennett's book *The Novelle*, would have real value here. What Pritchett is looking for is distinction, in its most literal sense. He is not trying to abstract out a featureless universal novel with universal rules, or plot the historical curve of its rise and fall as a type, but simply to see how the *genus* novel manifests itself in a wide range of unique instances. This saves him from a good many logical fallacies, and creates a sense of freedom. What any novel in the past has been increases our sense of what a novel may be, but in no way limits or determines the character of any novel that has still to be written.

Since Pritchett is out to isolate and qualify the unique characteristics

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of individual works, his prose is definitive, metaphoric, and epigrammatic, with eighteenth-century antitheses but not eighteenth-century abstractness. And just as he rediscovers a great many nearly forgotten books and makes them sound convincingly readable, so he discovers a great many fresh conjunctions, like the comparison of Hood's *Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Leg* with Zola's *Germinal,* of the death of Smollett's Hawser Trunnion with the great death scene at the end of *The Possessed,* of Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* with Erckmann-Chatrian's *Conscript of 1813,* of the childhood memories of Proust and Aksakov. Pritchett brings these together not to prove influences or establish categories; his method demands it for a different reason. To define uniqueness precisely, he must put a writer's distinctive achievements beside those which most closely resemble them in some other writer, and then point the differences.

Although Pritchett respects the separateness and personality of each novel as a thing in itself, he goes on, once he has defined its distinctiveness, to try similarly to isolate and define the new point in life itself, the new way of seeing, from which it has sprung, and in this search he uses both sociological and psychoanalytic insights within their natural limits. The great writer is of his time because he is sensitive to the "intrinsic situation" and the new way of feeling and seeing it involves. His knowledge of past literature and of what it has and has not said enables him to recognize the distinctively and valuably new in his own experience, and at the same time, since books proceed from books as well as from life, this knowledge teaches him how to make that newness into art. The second-rate writer is not of his time, because he repeats what has already been seen and said. The amateur writer does not know what to make of what he sees.

The great thing is to be immersed in life, to be committed, to see fully, and yet to have such respect for the work of art itself that one permits nothing to enter into it that cannot be subdued to its purpose. Anatole France was immersed in books rather than life; in his prose wine and sex take the place of blood and vitality. With the hard-boiled writers, toughness, "that is to say fear of facing the whole subject, as Crane faced it, has intervened to make the modern writer's picture purely visual and inhumane." And yet the character of the vision must not be allowed to destroy the integrity of the medium. "For the effect of psychological intuitions and discoveries upon our novel is to make it reminiscent, autobiographical, plotless." And when plot goes, the isolation

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of characters results, an isolation we began to see in Dickens' soliloquizing characters who are really all talking to themselves.

Pritchett values the Russians most because they are so in the midst of life, of people, of the nation, and yet see so clearly and widely. In *The Eternal Husband,* Dostoevsky's one Western novel, written when he had temporarily exhausted his anxiety for salvation, Dostoevsky could even see the comic aspects of the strange and terrifying collisions and conjunctions of the inner life. But though he likes the Russian novel, Pritchett's own temperamental bias is toward the eighteenth century, toward Gulliver and Candide, toward rational humanism and a tolerant acceptance of the varieties of human types and ideas. "Egging readers on to personal conversion is not one of the functions of the novel." "The compensations of life are not moral; they are simply more life of a different kind." "Propaganda does not become art until it has the grace and courage to welcome the apparent defeat of its purpose."

Robert Gorham Davis

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VARIETY

MR. ELIOT'S EVENING SERVICE

How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!
With his features of clerical cut,
And his brow so grim
And his mouth so prim
And his conversation, so nicely
Restricted to What Precisely
And If and Perhaps and But.
(from: "Lines for Cuscuscaraway and Mirza Murad Ali Beg")

The masters of the subtle schools
Are controversial, polymath.
(from: "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service")

The meeting convened at the Parish House of St. Thomas's Church in Washington, D.C. Mr. Eliot spoke under the auspices of the Episcopal Fellowship. This was to have been a private gathering, an informal exchange of views between the illustrious visitor-expatriate and the few dozen regular members of the Fellowship; but, alas, the news of the meeting had slipped into the entertainment columns of the *Washington Post*—a few lines about "T. S. Eliot whose play 'Murder in the Cathedral' has made him a noted dramatist will speak, etc." sandwiched between the cliché announcements of local motion picture attractions—and instead of the expected small group of twenty or thirty parishioners, some 150 to 200 outsiders, school teachers, students, civil servants, and members of the diplomatic staff had made the pilgrimage to the Parish House and filled the bare, somber meeting hall until it overflowed and the late-comers were crowding and pushing around the narrow entrance door.

This was a bad setting for the purpose of the meeting. Mr. Eliot was hesitant. The extemporaneously spoken word in public must be a great effort in any case. The overflow audience of strangers seemed to make it even more difficult. Free speech came haltingly as if constantly preyed upon by numerous censors, as if each word were released only by accident and never attained the full blessing of the aim achieved. Mr. Eliot welcomed the opportunity of being an emissary for the Community of Episcopal Churches throughout the English-speaking world; but, alas, he was hesitant and unprepared "for this specific situation . . . or any situation in general."

His was a strange performance; and the setting of the Parish House as well as the incongruity of the composition of the audience made it even stranger. There was a delicate, almost embarrassing element in it for those who came to hear the "noted" poet T. S. Eliot. What they did hear was the recital of a rather private record, almost in the nature of a diary, of Mr. Eliot's credentials as a guest-speaker be-

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fore the Episcopal Fellowship. This is what they heard.

For thirteen years Mr. Eliot was a Vicar's Warden in an unspecified church in Kensington. There is much to be learned from performing such a church function in a residential urban community over such a long time. For instance, it appears that the Church of England (like so many other worthy organizations in the post-war world) suffers from a lack of funds. The urgent task of repairing or totally rebuilding bomb-damaged houses of worship is not an easy undertaking, partly because of the declining Church revenues, partly because of the unavailability of building materials and the ever-present maze of bureaucratic red tape. A lady in the audience, big-bosomed, gray-haired, and volatile, took this opportunity to denounce the Labour Government's encroachment on Church property. Mr. Eliot explained patiently that, according to his knowledge, Church property had not suffered from the nationalization of coal mines, but he recalled a letter to *The Times* according to which Church revenues had been affected by the nationalization of the railroads which, it seems, caused a considerable decline in railroad stocks. At any rate, Church finances were not in too good a shape, and the stipends were too low even for the celibate curates—not to speak of the married men. This did not entirely satisfy the lady questioner who seemed to have special sources of information according to which the Church did own coal mining property which the Labour Government had expropriated. Mr. Eliot, pleading ignorance, did not indulge in a criticism of the Labour Government. Even when pressed for an affidavit on Mr. Attlee's religious convictions (the lady asked: "Isn't Mr. Attlee some kind of a Quaker?"), Mr. Eliot hesitated long before replying cautiously: "I really don't know." This confession of ignorance and non-concern, after searching deliberation, was one of the rare occasions for an outburst of general hilarity among the audience. Mr. Eliot was even inclined to take a rather favorable view of Mr. Attlee's influence on Church affairs. Mr. Attlee, while perhaps not particularly interested in the welfare of the Church of England, at least was conscientious enough to seek advice concerning matters affecting Church interests. This Mr. Eliot considered, on the whole, a much better arrangement than that which had prevailed with many a former Prime Minister who took so lively and personal an interest in Church affairs that he refused to listen to any advice whatsoever. Under these circumstances of a respectfully tolerant attitude by the Government, Mr. Eliot was also inclined to discount any proposals concerning the disestablishment of the Church of England. Discussions on this point were definitely premature, i.e., would have to await the outcome of events which

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had not yet happened. In any case, however, it was Mr. Eliot's opinion that the Church should do nothing to disestablish itself.

Repair of bomb damage and relations with secular authorities, however, are not the only concern of church wardens. Mr. Eliot's church in Kensington, for example, was undamaged by bombs except for a stained glass window which, as he added, was so ugly that it should have been replaced anyway; but there are other enemies attacking religious as well as secular buildings. In the Kensington church, the worst enemy was dry rot. On the subject of dry rot Mr. Eliot (perhaps to no one's surprise) grew eloquent and emphatic. It causes the kind of invisible deterioration which it is hardest to prevent. Since dry rot was not covered by the War Damage Insurance Act (under which, of course, the Kensington church had faithfully made its payments during the war) the parish was compelled to raise funds by subscription. The raising of funds, however, was only the beginning. Next, applications had to be made to the Board of Works for a license on building materials. In England the bureaucratic maze is further complicated by the fact that a special Church Board is set up in the Board of Works. To deal with these various channels of bureacratic authority in a situation of material scarcity is time-consuming and, as most people would agree, usually unsatisfactory in the long run. Thus the

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Board finally granted a 10 percent license for Mr. Eliot's church which was, of course, entirely insufficient to alleviate the serious conditions caused by progressive dry rot.

From the dry rot in rafters of Church buildings the discussion turned to the question of "dry rot" in the edifice of the Church as an institution. Mr. Eliot was pessimistic. War and post-war periods, he believed, were never particularly conducive to piety and devotion. Moreover, the trend towards an increasing "laicization of religious symbols," the undue emphasis on the social and sociological importance of Christian principles, was still unchecked; and Mr. Eliot considered this development a serious threat to the religious import of Christianity in the modern world. He also pleaded for a revision in the traditional type of religious education. There had been an undue emphasis on the emotional component of Christianity in order to reach the minds of the very young children; as a consequence, not enough attention had been given to the rational content of religion in order to make the subject worthy of interest to the intellectually most fertile period of youth betwen fourteen and seventeen. In this connection, Mr. Eliot also commented briefly on Mr. Butler's Education Bill. Church circles, of course, had carefully scrutinized this document with regard to its implications as to the place of re-

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ligion in public or private schools. Unfortunately, Mr. Eliot confessed, pressure of other work had prevented him from personally following the developments in this field during the last year so that he did not feel qualified to discuss it any further.

But there were other notable achievements on the list of Mr. Eliot's credentials for the evening. Besides serving as a Vicar's Warden in Kensington, he was also a member of the Advisory Committee to the Editorial Board of the *Christian News Letter*. Through this affiliation he had some contact with the ecumenical movement. He was somewhat reluctant to enlarge upon this experience; but it appeared to those who were at best interested amateurs in these highly specialized matters that Mr. Eliot did not set too high a store by the ecumenical movement as an instrument of Christian restoration. Those who were least dogmatic on theological grounds were most extreme in embracing the ecumenical idea; thus the religious principles behind the idea did not measure up to the zeal of the protagonists for the idea.

The purity of the "Catholic" tradition and orientation of the Church of England was a matter of serious, general concern to Mr. Eliot. This was also evident from the controversy over the plans for a new cathedral at Coventry. There were two such plans: one which proposed the erection of a

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theologically pure "Catholic" cathedral, another which proposed some kind of an architectural-theological mélange: a mixture between a cathedral and some common halls of worship for the general "non-Catholic" public. Mr. Eliot's preference lay with the former.

Again, Mr. Eliot had been asked to write a report "On the Union of Churches in South India"—a matter to which he had also devoted some years of private study. He came to the conclusion that union of the Churches in South India could only be had at the unacceptable price of a sacrifice of religious principles. Similarly, he expressed strong disapproval of the negotiations concerning the possible merger of the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches in the United States. These negotiations, he reported, were viewed by responsible circles in the Church of England with "great apprehension" and as a "most dangerous trend."

He was most outspoken in his report on the Malvern Conference —another item on the list of his Church activities during the war years—outspoken and critical. The attendance had been too large (some 200 representatives) for any profound discussion of the issues on the agenda. Moreover, those who did come to the Conference were not really and truly representative of the various interested religious groups. The resolutions adopted at the Conference were railroaded through by Archbishop Temple at a time when most delegates were either out for lunch or ready to go home. Furthermore, the resolutions bore no relation to the papers read or the discussion on the papers. In reply to a question whether these resolutions constituted a "liberalization of the Church doctrine," Mr. Eliot admitted that they were liberal "in stripe," but he did not recall any discussion of Church principles which might have been liberalized.

Mr. Eliot was a member (or "spare wheel," as he called it) of still another committee—appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury for a report on the state of the Church in England. There were actually three committees working on this report representing various shades of belief in the Anglican Community of Christians: an Anglo-Catholic, a Liberal-Evangelical, and a Free Church committee; but the latter two either did not function at all or, if they did, did not deliver any goods. The Free Churches could not even agree on the composition of the committee. The Liberal-Evangelical committee met, but could not agree on any common principles which might be submitted for the purposes of the study. It was different with the Anglo-Catholic committee. Mr. Eliot, growing visibly warmer, was deeply stirred while recalling a long list of "young, brilliant Anglican theologians" who had rendered "brilliant" services not only to the cause of the committee, but also in their respective

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fields of theological specialization: the liturgical movement, the Old Testament, the posthumous Fourth Gospel, the subtle inquiries into the borderline between theology and sociology. Unfortunately, their names cannot be reproduced here although Mr. Eliot lingered long and affectionately over everyone of them. They represented the galaxy of stars in the firmament of the English Christendom, eclipsing by their brilliance the two or three minor lights in the non-Catholic ranks which Mr. Eliot credited rather condescendingly with at least good intentions and a certain degree of professional competence.

Late in the evening, there occurred an interruption which introduced a slightly jarring note of disharmony into Mr. Eliot's presentation of his credentials. A young student from a local university rose in the front row and asked impatiently: "Mr. Eliot, why are you opposed to a secular, rationalist society?" Recovering quickly from the unexpected protest, Mr. Eliot replied briefly, with an undertone of irony: "I proceed on the assumption that the Christian idea is a true idea; and that it is better to embrace a true idea than any other. Of course, we might push the inquiry further back and question these assumptions; but I dare say this is neither the place nor the time for such an inquiry." He was right. The Chairman called the meeting to an end and requested that the benediction be pronounced. The audience rose. Mr. Eliot bowed low.

Such was the record. It was a long and impressive documentation of Mr. Eliot's credentials as a member of the "Community of Christians." Yet those who were strangers to this community—and they were a majority at the Parish House that evening—those who were strangers to this side of Mr. Eliot's universe of discourse and the auspices under which he spoke were strangely moved by the incongruity between this performance and their own frame of reference. And their questioning surprise was reinforced by the after-image of the man: tall, gaunt, of pallid hue, and tensely withdrawn from anything reminiscent of the flesh, did he not belong more rightfully in a monastic order than in the Fellowship of the respectable, upper-class citizens gathered in the Parish House of St. Thomas's Church? In a monastic order there would be no irreconcilable conflict between mystic, poetic ecstasy and the practical

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pursuits of life, the tending of flowers and bees, the manual tasks at the work bench, the accumulation of Church revenue, the diplomatic negotiations with secular authorities, the repair of dry rot in the buildings. Nor would the cycle of his life have to deny its origin or stopping places on the way.

The following afternoon Mr. Eliot read, before another overflow audience, a recital of his poetry in the air-conditioned, plush-seated auditorium of the National Art Gallery. He was an extremely subtle, sensitive, and effective reader. The recital included the following poems from his collected works: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "La Figlia che Piange," "Sweeney among the Nightingales," "What the Thunder Said," "Because I Do Not Hope To Turn Again," "Journey of the Magi," "Animula," the five "Landscapes," and "East Coker."

Hans Meyerhoff

WHO ARE THE COUNTERFEITERS?

MOSCOW, Nov. 23 (UP)).—The Soviet **LITERARY GAZETTE**, criticising award of the 1947 Nobel Prize in literature to Frenchman Andre Gide, said yesterday that the prize committee was a group of "reactionary Swedish politicians who by every means encourage the theoreticians of national treachery."

Gide, the **GAZETTE** said, was an admirer of Hitler and was saved from arrest only by the intervention of Gen. Charles de Gaulle.

—*Daily Worker*

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BERLIN POSTSCRIPT

Sirs:

There's been a tremendous interest in PR here in Berlin since the fracas at the German Writers' Congress [when PR's Berlin correspondent startled the Russian-sponsored congress by describing the life of a writer under Stalin.—*Editorial note*]. But absolutely no foreign books or magazines are available. People have heard of Koestler, Burnham, Trotsky; no library, however, has anything modern in politics or literature. Whatever is mailed to me here will be put in a kind of private lending-library in my office for the benefit of editors, publishers, and writers. Reviews of politics, economics, history, psychology, literature are particularly wanted. Literary people can help with things like Melville and Henry James, for whom there are several publishers. I may say that the few publishers' readers who have been going through my copies of PR have been quite floored; for them, of course, it was an America beyond their knowledge, beyond their expectations.

Melvin J. Lasky

Lasky's address is the U.S. Press Center, US Army APO 742 A, Postmaster, New York.

DIFFERENT EXPOSURE

Sirs:

This is an "I deplore" letter. An intermittent reader of PARTISAN REVIEW, strongly drawn from the first to its pages by its generally high level of partisanship, I never expected to address such a letter to its editors. But in my memory no review of the pretended character of your magazine has descended quite to the level that some of your pages represent in your September-October number. I deplore the temper of the cheap and vulgar reviews of the literary studies of William Tindall and Edwin Burgum. When reviewers apply such epithets as "fat overgrown bed bug" and "vicious fool" to the authors they are reviewing, they degrade themselves beneath their victims and raise the serious question whether a proper editorial judgment would have assigned to persons so intemperate books to review, or would have printed the resulting smears. I have no objection to your reviewers exposing the limitations of Messrs. Tindall and Burgum if they can do so by appealing to my reason rather than to my passions—I am not in the camp of either man—but one does not even have to revert to their books to know that they are better contained and more sensitive than their reviewers. The latter have served you very badly indeed if they leave a presumption of inequality and unfitness on your part to weigh the volumes you elect to

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study; by selecting the books of Tindall and Burgum for critical evaluation you imply values your reviewers do not find in them, else why did you choose them? I am puzzled at the whole sorry business, but sincerely hope that it does not presage the decline of a magazine I have found informative and discriminating.

Oscar Cargill

New York City

Sirs:

Why does PR waste its readers' time by trying to revive the literary reputation of a man like Ernst Juenger, an *enfant terrible* of the Weimar period, now safely back in the fold of "humanism" because of the defeat of the blood-and-iron philosophy. And Mr. Clair, author of the article on Juenger, seems to be making an effort to inflate the German writer's achievement as a novelist by speaking in such exalted terms of *The Marble Cliffs.*

This appears especially anomalous in an issue in which you continue the dissident and iconoclastic tradition of PR. I was particularly struck by the vigor and courage with which your reviewers handled the books by Burgum and Tyndall. These books are bad in entirely different ways; your reviewers — Messrs. Bazelon and Todd—were the only ones I've read who noticed the specific badness of each, applying the right criteria and the necessary energy of condemnation. The same rigorous standards, if applied to the work of Juenger, would have resulted in a more adequate treatment of his work.

PR is the only literary periodical in this country in which one can expect that a party-line critic like Professor Burgum would be dealt with in the right way.

Robert Hyde, Jr.

Chicago, Illinois

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Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Martin Ebon, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Partisan Review and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management etc., for the aforesaid publication for the date shown in above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form to wit:

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